

My Journey in Life

A Student
Textbook
for Character
Development



INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

My Journey in Life

A Student Textbook for Character Education

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INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

**My Journey in Life:
A Student Textbook for Character Education**

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Comments on the Course

My Journey in Life: A Student Textbook for Character Development (formerly *My World & I: The Way of Unification*)

“In school we study many subjects—geometric theorems, the laws of physics, literature where we get to know the works of famous writers and poets, foreign languages, and many other things. Of course, they are very important, but there is something more important. It is the ability to determine your place in life, in society; the ability to choose values necessary to reach your goals, to learn to handle your emotions, to overcome temptations, and, most important, to achieve peace and harmony in your heart. This course helped me to deal with these questions more than any other.”

A 10th grade student, Moscow

“I have been teaching *My World & I: The Way of Unification* for 2 years. The children’s attitude towards this course is very positive. After studying this course for a year, students gave such answers to the question ‘What did I gain from this course?’:

‘I have become more tolerant. There are fewer conflicts in my family.’

‘It reconciled me with my father.’

‘I could see that I can change. I thought I was hopeless and deprived of any capability.’”

T. Akhmadulina

St. Petersburg teacher

“There are chapters in the textbook *My World & I: The Way of Unification* dedicated to such important moral issues as forgiveness, respect and tolerance, freedom and responsibility, conscience, honesty, friendship, overcoming temptations, creating a family, the ability to love and to be a good friend, learning to accept others and to be accepted.

“The authors strive to show the way to raise up not only a deeply conscientious person, but a person who is successful in all spheres of life: family, vocation, relationships with both friends and those who wish ill, resisting negative influences from the environment and changing one’s own bad habits.”

I. A. Anosova, Ph.D.

Dean of the Department of Philosophy and Political Science
St. Petersburg University of Culture and Arts, Russia

“The general impression from both a quick and attentive reading of the student textbook is extremely positive. It truly in a very holistic way introduces the reader to the world of fundamental moral and spiritual values. Perhaps this is the first publication of its kind in the Russian language. I haven’t seen the publication of anything like it in our country.

“The first thing that attracts the reader is the manner in which the text is written. There is not a single paragraph where the young reader will be offended by an authoritarian direction. Rather, the book is written in the manner of an interesting and thoughtful conversation. The authors write as if they are conducting a dialogue or at least leave space for potential dialogue.

“The methodology corresponds to this approach. Each chapter is followed either by questions under the heading “Something to Think About”, suggestions to write

something “For Your Journal”, or some additional material connecting to was spoken about in the ‘conversations’ with the students in the main body of the text.

“The authors gradually, step by step, introduce the reader to the world of higher values: merciful love, compassion, nobility, righteousness, courage, etc. The authors try to use common sense as the starting point and experiences that the readers may have had to show that these core values of human existence are natural and essential for life.”

R. G. Aprysian, Ph.D.

*Senior Lecturer, Institute of Philosophy
Russian Academy of Science*

“From the point of view of experienced teachers and scientific workers in general, who have had more than 35 years of practical experience as teachers, the textbook *My World & I: The Way of Unification* is a unique event in the field of teaching theory and school practice. The textbook absolutely deserves the highest commendation. This publication of the International Educational Foundation is an altruistic effort directed at supporting humanitarianism by promoting universal values among youth.”

Olga R. Archegova, Robert M. Ganiev

Assistant Professors of Education, Vladikavkaz State University, Russia

“Unfortunately the modern concept of education does not give proper attention to the idea of personal moral growth. How does one attain personal maturity? How is happiness achieved? What is the meaning of a decent life? How can one distinguish good from evil? What is morality? In posing these questions the authors of the textbook do not hurry to give ready answers. On the contrary, they aim to stimulate thinking on these questions and to encourage the mind to listen to the voice of one’s conscience.”

Pavel S. Gurevich, Ph.D.

*Professor of Philosophy, Moscow Social Pedagogical Institute
Vice-President, Academy of Humanitarian Research*

“The authors suggest that norms and values of different cultures and religions not only do not contradict each other but are either fundamentally alike or in many ways complement each other. The textbook invites children to reflect on such important values as goodness, mercy, honesty and conscience.”

M. Lutfulloev, Ph.D.

*Director of the Scientific Research Institute of Pedagogical Science
Dushanbe, Tajikistan*

“The book, in agreement with Russian pedagogical tradition, puts priority on moral upbringing rather than on intellectual development. However, teaching about the role of the conscience is presented in detail for the first time in a Russian textbook.

“The fight against the influence of alcohol, nicotine and other drugs on children is one of the most acute problems worldwide. The tactfully-presented material on these topics can be considered a triumph of those who are the authors of this textbook.”

T. Molodstova, Ph.D.

*Dean of the Department of Social Pedagogy
Taganrog State Pedagogical University*

A. Fyodorov, Ph.D.

*Professor of Social Pedagogy
Taganrog State Pedagogical University, Russia*

“The main moral questions that every person needs to answer in his life is: ‘What kind of person am I now and what kind of person do I want to become?’ The course *My World and I: The Way of Unification* helps students to answer these most crucial questions.

“The course provides students the opportunity for self-improvement based on the ethical experience of humanity. It helps students to form an image of themselves. While studying this course teenagers develop a desire to understand their unique value and their inner world; what does it mean to be a human being.

‘I am often rough and nasty’, writes one 7th grade student. “I don’t like it in myself, but the course is helping me to change.’

‘Before I never thought about the way I act: whether it’s good or bad, but now I think of how my actions affect others and what others think of me’, writes a 9th grade student in his composition about the course.

‘When I gave my mom flowers, she was laughing out of joy”, writes another 9th grade student. - “This course inspired me to do that.””

Larisa Shmakova

School vice-principal, Ryazan, Russia

“The course is an amazing discovery for everybody: teachers, parents and grandparents. It is as important for our children today as the air itself.”

Svetlana Smirnova

St. Petersburg teacher

“This book includes very interesting material that is not traditional for Russian schools. An analysis shows that the authors have a very noble goal: to support the process of students’ spiritual development. Taking into account the great vacuum that exists in this area of the school curriculum, the material cannot but attract the attention of both academics and practicing teachers.

“(The book) reflects the realization of two concepts. One, realized in its content and structure, supports the development of the students’ personality by means of studying the ethical teachings of the world’s religions. The other, realized as a pedagogical concept, encourages the process of self-analysis and self-understanding.

“Even more so, the content is so rich and embraces so many different areas that even a mere reading of the book cannot but be very useful for a person.”

Y. V. Sokolov, Ph.D.

*Professor of Theory & History of Culture
State Academy of Culture, St. Petersburg*

“I cannot help but support the idea, proposed by the authors, of the oneness of the four concepts of mature personality, strong family, peaceful community , and creative human activity.”

L. Y. Verb, Ph.D.

*Professor of Pedagogy
St. Petersburg University of Culture and Arts, Russia*

Preface

The *My Journey in Life* series represents a unique collaboration of an international team of educators and writers. The original versions, appearing under the title *My World & I*, were published at a time when the Cold War was coming to an end and opportunities for ventures between the democratic and communist worlds were opening up in many different fields. Thus, they are probably the first of their kind covering an area of vital concern to cultures throughout the world—the moral education of children. In the nations in which they are being used, these books offer a refreshing approach to the field and are seen as a valuable resource supporting the character development of the young generation.

The early 1990s was a period of optimism when many people throughout the world harbored the hope that lasting peace and harmony was finally within our grasp. However, as the shadow of the Cold War receded, other problems came to the fore to show us that we were still a long way from this ideal. Both the democratic and former communist worlds were being afflicted by similar social problems, such as ethnic conflicts, youth violence, alcoholism, drug abuse, divorce and family breakdown, and a proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases. These problems were symptomatic of a severe crisis of values born of a century that placed the highest priority on scientific and technological development while neglecting to honor and promote the traditional values that had provided a sense of social cohesion and spiritual well being. Brought up to believe that scientific knowledge could solve all of our problems, young people were cast adrift to find answers for themselves in fundamental areas of human life, such as the maturing of their character, preparing for marriage and raising a successful family.

In many of today's societies there is no longer any consensus about right and wrong or which values should lie at the heart of education. Children often seem to question all values and authority, leaving parents and teachers unsure how to guide them. Ignoring the deeper questions about life, many young people pursue a hedonistic lifestyle of self-gratification, seeking to find happiness in material pursuits.

The International Educational Foundation (IEF), through its activities and publications, is seeking to address this worldwide challenge by offering an approach that combines the best of contemporary and traditional values, spiritual and material values, and Eastern and Western values. We call this a universal values approach. It is an approach that emphasizes what we have in common by stressing timeless values and presenting them in a way that can appeal to the idealistic sensibilities of young people transcending cultures.

IEF works in the fields of character education, youth purity education, marriage and family education, and service education or voluntarism. In the field of character education, we have been emphasizing the need to cultivate the hearts and con-

sciences of children in addition to the education of their intellects, which has been overemphasized during the past century. Based upon the teachings of Dr. Sun Myung Moon, known as the Unification Principle, the *My Journey in Life* two-volume series is an attempt to meet this need.

By teaching universal principles and values, *My Journey in Life: A Student Textbook for Character Development*, seeks to help those in their early teens to develop their heart and character, emphasizing the importance of mind/body unity, the development of the conscience, and sexual purity. As a support, it includes the moral and ethical teachings of the world's great religious traditions, which are at the root of most of the world's cultures.

With lesson themes such as "What Kind of Person Should I Become?," "What to Live For?" and "The Challenge of Life," the text engages pupils in internalizing fundamental values that are at the center of good character. In this way the curriculum seeks to help young people develop the inner strength to resist negative peer pressure and detrimental social influences that are so rampant in today's world.

Fundamentally, this book challenges the student to examine the principles and resultant values that constitute a meaningful life. It offers three basic life goals as a framework for this: becoming persons of mature character, establishing loving relationships and family, and caring for and contributing to the natural and human environment. If young people can be made aware of these life goals and be inspired to strive for them, it will greatly help them to resist the destructive temptations of drugs, crime and promiscuous sex. Ultimately, such socially destructive influences will only be overcome by offering young people an achievable alternative that speaks to their most fundamental hopes and dreams in life.

The second volume, *My Journey in Life: A Student Textbook for Developing Loving Relationships*, written for those in their mid-teens, focuses on human relationships, particularly in preparation for marriage and family. It includes topics on human sexuality, marriage, family, conflict resolution and social responsibility. It also covers problems such as divorce, single parent families, alcoholism and experiencing rejection. The book features marriage and family traditions in the world's religions to demonstrate that there are basic universal norms of human love and its sexual expression. In this way students can develop their vision of a realistic ideal for their relationships and future marriages while being aware of the pitfalls along the way.

If the evaluations by pedagogical experts and the reflections on the part of teachers and students who have used this curriculum are any indication, then it would seem that both *My Journey in Life* books have been a resounding success. Receiving high praise for their content and interactive methodological approach, the curriculum has inspired both teachers and students to strive for higher ideals in their lives. For example, in one study conducted among teachers using the material in the Ivanovo Region of Russia, a high majority of them reported a significant impact on their own personal character development.

Due to circumstances the *My Journey in Life* series appeared first in Russia, followed by many of the former Soviet republics. However, this work was envisioned long before the actual publication in the early 1990s. Although first used in Russia, they were written with the young people of the entire world in mind. Thus, these texts should not be seen as a translation of the Russian, but represent improved editions of the original English texts. In response to numerous requests from around the world, IEF wishes to offer these English editions for your use. I encourage you to translate them into your national language and to contextualize the contents using literary sources and examples from your own culture. You may draw upon IEF's experience to assist you in this process.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the sincere investment of heart and effort by the many people involved in the production of these books. Working under my guidance on the original writing team were Myra Stanecki-Kozlowski, William Haines, Dorothy Kolomeisky, Anna Bzhiska and Prof. Bronislaw Bitinas, a well-known pedagogue from Vilnius University in Lithuania, who served as scientific editor. This team worked long hours with a sense of urgency investing their creative energies to produce the first editions. Others who worked in the creation of the Russian editions were Kevin Convery, as art director, Claude Aubert and Arthur Dagilev, in design and layout, and many others too numerous to mention by name. All of their efforts are deeply appreciated. As well I would like to express my gratitude to those who worked on the present English editions of these books: Robert Beebe—project coordinator, Jack Corley and Thomas Phillips—advisors, Josephine Hauer and Hyun Jin Schuller—copy editors, Gareth Davies—research, and Renee Corley—proofreader. I would like also to give a special word of thanks to Ittetsu Aoki and his team for their valuable support of this project.

My hope is that these books, which have given much inspiration and joy to thousands of school children and their teachers in the former Soviet Union, in their English editions will benefit countless others throughout the world and contribute to the character development of the young generation in many different nations and cultures.

Dr. Joon Ho Seuk
President, IEF International
Director, My Journey in Life Project

Historical Background

Founded in 1990 by Dr. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon to promote moral and ethical values in education, the International Educational Foundation began its work in Moscow just as the Soviet Union was collapsing. Soon after Dr. Moon's meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev in the Kremlin in April 1990, in cooperation with the Soviet Ministry of Higher Education, IEF sponsored a series of International Leadership Seminars in America for more than 3500 students and professors. On this foundation, in November 1992, with the support of the Russian Ministry of Education, which invited delegations from each of the 88 regions of the Russian Federation, IEF held conferences in the Crimea under the theme "Spiritual Renewal and School Education in Russia". In addition, more than 300 school directors from the Ukraine attended. In all, more than 1,600 participants took part in the conferences, whose theme was the necessity of moral and ethical education. The lectures were based on the fundamental values and concepts of the Unification Principle, emphasizing their use as a foundation for moral education.

Participants found the theme of the program timely. With the collapse of communism the ideological framework for the teaching of morals and ethics had been suddenly discarded. At the same time young people struggled to understand how to employ their newly found freedoms. Many chose to pursue with abandon the material benefits long denied them. In reaction to the collectivism of the past the post-Soviet period saw the rise of extreme individualism.

As a result of their experience in the program the participants were inspired by the challenge of developing a curriculum to promote moral and ethical values to young people in an engaging and contemporary manner. The next step was organizing a group to undertake this task.

In January 1993, an international writing team working under the guidance of IEF president, Dr. Joon Ho Seuk, was assembled in Moscow and set about preparing a curriculum in time for the new school year beginning in September. Thus began the first project of the International Educational Foundation in the former Soviet Union.

Working at a rapid pace, the first edition of *My World & I: The Way of Unification* (original title of *My Journey in Life: A Student Textbook for Character Development*), intended for 13-15 year olds, was published together with an accompanying teacher's manual. In the summer of 1993, IEF held its first Teacher Training Workshops in order to train teachers how to use the new curriculum. In these workshops lectures explaining the philosophical foundation of the curriculum were presented as well as lectures suggesting innovative methodological approaches appropriate to the teaching of the material. In 1994 IEF produced a second volume of *My World & I*, subtitled *The Way of Love* (now *My Journey in Life: A Student Textbook for Developing Loving Relationships*), written for 15-17 year olds. In subsequent years IEF went on to publish

other student textbooks, teacher's manuals, and handbooks for parents, designed to be use for various age levels. Many of these have been translated into different languages with the support of various ministries of education. Each year IEF conducts hundreds of training seminars involving thousands of teachers throughout the CIS, Baltic States and Mongolia to instruct them on the use of the materials. At these seminars and in other ways, hundreds of thousands of books have been distributed in these countries. Currently more than ten thousand schools are using IEF course materials.

On the Way to Self-Realization

My Journey in Life: A Student Textbook for Character Development is unusual in many respects. Its appearance is the fruit of the cooperation among an international team of educators, both theoreticians and practitioners. Such cooperation in science is common, but in the sphere of education and the upbringing of children, it is one of the first efforts of its kind.

What was most wonderful in the preparation of this book was the energy and enthusiasm of the people who were creating it. Between the time when the first outline was made and the publication of the first edition of the book, less than a year elapsed. The writers were not simply enthusiasts, but they did something that seemed impossible. This second edition represents a substantial revision and improvement following the helpful suggestions of many scholars, teachers and students.

This publication developed from essential insights of Dr. Sun Myung Moon on human nature and family development. Therefore, the content reflects the idea of love in all its breadth and fullness, while absolutely denying hatred in all its manifestations, between peoples, religions, classes, as well as individuals. The content is based on the premise that, by observing the harmony of the natural world, we can recognize the value of practicing unselfish, mature love in human relationships. Love that seeks the benefit of others brings the experience of deep joy and satisfaction that serves as the best justification for living an ethical life. This is the fundamental premise of this book.

Love is described in the form of universal human values, such as responsibility for oneself and others. Love is also realized on many levels simultaneously, on the level of individual, family, society, humanity and in relationship with a higher being. Respect and tolerance toward others holding different belief systems and cultural mores are also integral to an ethical practice of love. This text also recognizes that religion has been a primary vehicle for conveying universal values within cultures. Thus, included are some ethical teachings of traditional religions of the C.I.S. as well as neighboring countries. Also incorporated are ideas supporting a universal human morality and the psycho-pedagogical basis for personal growth and improvement of human relations.

A most important inquiry of any high school student is the question: "Who would you like to model your life after?" The text recognizes the importance of role models for young people. The authors considered it of no educational value to directly expound on philosophical ideas of ethics. Instead they chose to express ideas through artistic images and the living experiences of real people. In light of this approach, one of the book's strongest features is the way the content is connected with the ethnic culture of Russia. Russia and her people provide rich and varied resources for discussing moral and ethical content. The authors have also integrated

perspectives from other cultures, such as Asia and America, so that students may expand their cultural base of ethical knowledge.

The book is not a textbook in the strict sense. It is written as an active dialogue with the reader, offering counsel to young people who are already thinking about their lives and views of the surrounding world. Thus, a great number of alternative views expose the reader to a plurality of opinions. This is one of the distinctive and important features of the book.

While calling individuals to spiritual self-realization, the authors nevertheless express their own understanding of an ideal personality in an ideal society. In speaking of the basic life goals of human beings, the book promotes the development of mature individuals, healthy families, the peaceful association of people, and constructive human activity. Eminent thinkers of the past have proclaimed similar ideas, which remain of great value to the modern world community. It is hoped that the present book offers a similar contribution to the realization of the universal human dream.

B.P. Bitinas

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Pedagogical University of Vilnius, Lithuania

Scientific Editor of My Journey in Life

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Introduction

An artist, before attempting to create a masterpiece of supreme beauty and harmony, first tries to fix in his mind the perfect image of the end result. The final creation reflects and develops this image in a unique manner.

Likewise, we are all artists of our future. If as artists of life we want to make our lives a masterpiece, then it is also important to discover the best image or pathway for life itself. We need a clear vision and understanding of a most worthy purpose for human life. We need to understand how to create sincere and fulfilling relationships in our family, among friends, within society, with our nation and the world. These skills and deep understanding can help us capture the supreme beauty and harmony of a life striving for peace, love and goodness.

This course, *My Journey in Life: A Student Textbook for Character Development*, introduces you to a moral vision of life that will help you to find the path and destiny for creating the best “you.” Accepting that vision, of course, is your choice. We are confident that if you take this course seriously, it can point you on a path toward authentic happiness. In this journey we will explore many fundamental questions that are critical for success. We will examine the way we see

ourselves and our world and the values that influence our perspective. Most importantly, we will look at the principles necessary for achieving worthwhile goals.

With insightful education and deeper understanding of moral and ethical principles, we can cultivate a mature and refined self. We can learn how to deal with intense passions and pressures from within. We can have a sense that we are in control of our lives, that we are not victims of our environment, of manipulative people or of our own confusing emotions. We can learn to respect, value and love others, as well as ourselves, discovering fully that our life is valuable and meaningful.

The creation of ourselves is a lifelong project and is the most important task of anyone’s life. So let’s get started. Let’s begin our journey together.



CHAPTER 1

What Kind of Person Should I Become?

How many of you would like to live in a society that benefits others as well as yourself? Of course, we all would. But we know that's just a fairy tale ... or is it?

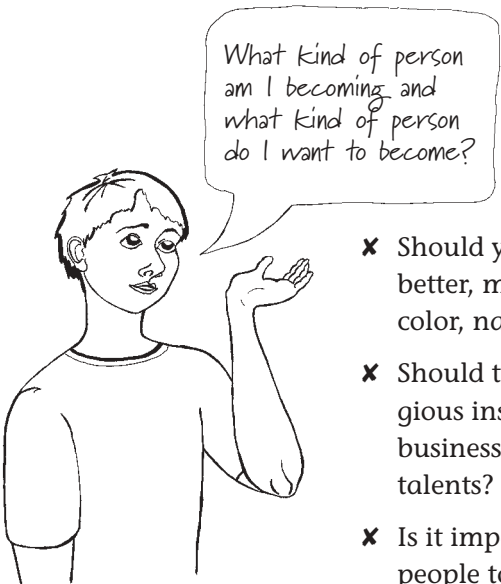
Most of us have experienced how difficult it is to find the balance between making others happy and doing what makes "me" happy. It's great when the two coincide, but what happens when they don't?

For instance, you are in the doorway about to run to a meeting that you expect to be pleasant and fun, though not necessary. Suddenly your friend calls and says he's in trouble. What is more important for you: your personal joy or your friend's misfortune? You cannot just tell him to leave you alone because you have no time to deal with his problems now, can you?

Or imagine a different situation. Your friends have invited you to a party and you are eager to go. But you know that your parents will not approve of your plans. What will you do?

Every day we come across situations requiring a moral choice. Sometimes it is easy to make a decision, but at other times we are really at a loss about what to do. These everyday little decisions have a lot to do with forming our character and determining our future life. That is why it is so important to consider a basic question: "What kind of person am I now and what kind of person do I want to become?"

Our choice of the moral principles that can guide our lives is very important and deserves careful consideration. Now you are at an important time — a time of such decisions — and may still have doubts about your opinions and convictions. For example:



What kind of person am I becoming and what kind of person do I want to become?

- ✗ Should you be honest all the time, or are "white lies" acceptable?
- ✗ Should you assume that happiness depends primarily on material possessions and a high position or on something else — for example, satisfying social work that has a lower pay, or investing time in family relationships, etc.?
- ✗ Should you respect all people or assume that some people or groups are better, more human or more deserving of rights than others, based on skin color, nationality, religion or sex?
- ✗ Should the deciding factor in your choice of career be to study at a prestigious institution, to receive a high salary, and to be able to take frequent business trips abroad — or to have the possibility to make full use of your talents?
- ✗ Is it important to maintain chastity before marriage, or is it OK for two people to have sex if they feel a strong attraction to each other?



Such questions bring us to wonder about adopting a system of moral values and principles that may guide us through these difficult choices. A basic understanding of spiritual and moral realities is vital for every person — the formation of our character depends on it. All of us want to be good people guided by values that we can rely on to help us to make the right choices. Do we like it when someone points out our bad qualities? Not usually, but we certainly like it when someone recognizes our good points. It's because we have an inner desire to be a good person. We don't like to be considered bad. It's the same when it

comes to being right. We don't like making mistakes, because we wish to be right. Do we usually like to win or lose an argument? Sometimes we're willing to fight to prove we're right. Isn't it true?

Intuitively we also feel that we must be honest with ourselves and other people. We know in our heart whether we've truly done a good thing or not, or whether we are right or wrong. Why is that? It's because of a mysterious thing called conscience, an inner voice helping us to make decisions in complicated situations. What our conscience whispers often resembles the voice of a teacher or a parent, but from deep inside our heart and mind. If our conscience normally urges us to do what is good, what happens when we go against the conscience? We experience the pangs of remorse, don't we?

Good and evil

What does it mean to be a good person? If you ask ten different people, you are sure to receive ten different answers. Though each of us strives to be good, either consciously or unconsciously, it's possible that our concepts of good and bad may be incorrect. Besides, every person goes through changes in life, and in the process of

growing, our ideas develop as well. Our notions of good and evil mature — that is, if we make a certain amount of effort.

So, on what basis do you define a good choice, one that is morally justified? To the right are some examples of what some teenagers consider good and what they would like to achieve in their lives.

Do you agree with such perspectives? Do you think you can become happy if guided by such principles? Can you think of problems you might come across if you determine good and evil in such terms?

To be human

Before trying to answer the question "What kind of person am I and what kind of person do I want to become?," perhaps we should ask a more general question: "What does it mean to be human?"

I would like ...

- to be liked and admired by others;
- to make a lot of money;
- not to encounter many difficulties or suffering in my life;
- to be able to influence other people;
- not to be the object of others' criticism or fault-finding;
- to have others do what I like

... and, generally, what I like is good and what I don't like is evil.

A tree grows involuntarily, receiving sunlight along with minerals and other nutrients from the soil, and, at maturity, bears fruit. From this point of view, everything that supports the purpose of this tree, namely its growth, is “good” — fertile soil, favorable climate, etc. Likewise, everything that interferes with the natural process is “evil” — a drought, a harmful insect, strong winds which break branches, and unexpected summer frosts.

In the same way, when considering human experience, good and evil should be determined based on a general notion of human personhood — with an ideal of being fully human, rather than by mere whims of any particular human being. Then everything that enables my human nature to develop to the fullest is good, while evil is that which hinders or detours this process. Unlike a tree, humans can experience good or bad influences both from within themselves and from outside of themselves.

All of us would agree that the first answer to the question “What kind of person should I become?” is that we become fully human, our truest, best selves. Only after considering what fulfilling our humanity really means, can we think about those particular forms of humanness that make me a unique personality among the

billions of people living on the planet.

What are some general ways in which people express their humanity? We can think of our attitudes as having four directions: attitudes toward higher principles, toward oneself, toward people and toward nature.

Attitude toward higher principles.

To be fully human means, first of all, to ask many questions about life, not only about one’s daily affairs, but also the so-called “eternal” or “ultimate” questions, such as about the nature of human existence. For centuries philosophers have tried to understand the things that make humans distinct from other beings. In his writings about proving the existence of God and the uniqueness of the human mind, Rene Descartes concluded that the only thing knowable with certainty is the fact that man is the only being in the world capable of questioning his own nature. By calling everything into doubt, Descartes laid

the foundations of modern philosophy. He deduced that human beings consist of minds and bodies; that these are totally distinct “substances.” He also asserted that God’s existence was a certainty because of the profundity and clarity of the idea itself present in the human mind.

Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a rhinoceros spending his days speculating about what it means to be a rhino. Would it make any difference in his actual life if he did? Human beings, however, since time began have been asking themselves about the meaning of life and death, of suffering and joy. This existential searching is fundamental to human nature. At some point in life we need to think about the principles and values that can guide our life. Though each of us might pose them differently, we all wonder about things such as: “What is the purpose of life?” “What is true love?” “What is happiness?” “How can I distinguish between right and wrong?”



Attitude toward oneself.

Having asked these timeless questions, we cannot expect immediate or easy understanding. The whole of human life provides ample opportunities to deepen our knowledge and insight as we grow in experience and awareness. Comprehending the depth and beauty of life always involves striving for consistency between thought or our beliefs and practice. If we just sit and wait until we know all the right answers, we may, in the end, realize nothing at all. At every stage of life it is best to practice what we've learned thus far. Only then will such general questions become real and meaningful to us. By the same token, asking the question "What is love?" brings us to reflect on our own capacity to be a loving person. "What is the purpose of life?" prompts me to think about the significance of my own life and how I want to live it. Practice helps me sort out what is and is not effective and how to best use the time I have while I'm alive.

Attitude toward people.

Often what we realize on our course of self-discovery is something that fits well with the experience of others; what holds true for myself is the same for others. For example, many people recognize that we all need one another, that human beings are interdependent. No one can live fully satisfied as an isolated person. Solitude can be very important in life if it is freely chosen, but if it's a result of our inability to communicate with others, it may lead to despair. Communication is important to us and remains so as we enter into marriage, a profession and the larger society. For now, we may be most concerned with our relationship with our parents and other members of our family, teachers, classmates and friends. Later on, a husband or wife and children, colleagues, friends and associates will occupy most of our time, and, of course, we want that time to be most rewarding and fruitful.

Attitude toward nature.

There is one more way in which every person expresses his/her essentially human nature: in one's attitude toward the natural world. Even if we have grown up in a large city surrounded by tall buildings and crowds, we cannot ignore nature, for we all live together on the same planet. Only recently have we discovered how much a significant natural disaster in one area can affect the ecological balance over a much wider area, even the whole planet. We've learned that one mistake of a few people working at a nuclear power plant can not only poison the air and water immediately around it, but also cause destruction to wildlife and people hundreds of miles away. The smallest actions of individuals and communities reflect our attitude toward nature. Leaving trash in a forest after a camping trip, allowing the leakage of gasoline and dumping of waste into rivers, and countless other careless actions have a far-reaching negative impact on the planet we all share.

Why should I be good?

Each of us must have faced this question more than once. Why should I be good? Why can't I live just as I please? It is because being good means being human. And if we choose some other way, sooner or later we will face the consequences of our choice.

Imagine the following simple example. You are tired of brushing your teeth every day. So you decide that from this moment on you will never brush your teeth again. From your body's viewpoint it would be a wrong decision, and soon you experience the effects of that decision. In a couple of months you develop cavities. What is worse, you refuse to see a dentist, and eventually you lose your teeth. And so, the final consequence of your decision to be bad to your teeth is that you spend the rest of your life eating oatmeal.

In the moral sphere, things are more complicated, but the general principle is the same. For instance, everybody would probably agree that being good means to love others, be honest, help those in need, etc. If you think that it's not necessary to be honest and that telling lies is sometimes useful, you may find there are certain benefits to lying. Phony flattery may impress some; you may become a master at convincing classmates to take your side, and so on. But in time people will realize that you are untrustworthy. Even if at that point you should decide to be sincere, it will take a lot more to restore trust than it was in the beginning when people accepted your word. Everyone desires to have friends, even if it's only a few trusted ones, and it isn't always easy to find them. So, why would we want to make things harder for ourselves by lying or doing other things which we know in the end only create barriers between ourselves and others?

What is morality?

Values and fundamental principles make up our personal morality and shape our character. Though we may not realize it, every day we make countless moral decisions. The decisions and choices we make, however small they may be or seem to be, shape the kind of person we become and reflect what life means to us. A wise saying captures this truth:

Plant an act; reap a habit.

Plant a habit; reap a virtue or a vice.

Plant a virtue or a vice; reap a character.

Plant a character; reap a destiny.

But then a very difficult question arises: Which values and principles should we adopt for our life?

Our standard of morality is important if we want to become a mature person who respects himself/herself and values others. Self-respect and self-acceptance are impor-

tant standards to begin an understanding of moral growth. If we are self-confident, feeling at peace with our conscience, we can be free to make sound decisions based on values we believe in. Instead of worrying about how we are coming across to others, we can look at a situation clearly and respond appropriately to what is needed.

At the same time, it is important to be aware of the significance of the moral choices we make every day and how they affect others, and not wander through life blindly. Some of our choices involve ordinary things such as what clothes to wear, what to eat, when to sleep, and so on. However valuable such things may be to us, they do not affect the development of our personality and character to the same extent that our spiritual or moral choices do.

Have you ever really asked yourself what kind of person you want to be? Perhaps you've thought of this before. Sometimes we want to be like this person, at other times like that person, and so on. We tend to model our lives after the people whom we most admire and respect. They become role models for us, and we seek to emulate their behavior and values in our own lives, even unconsciously. But how many times have we been disappointed when those people we admire do something that shatters our image of them? Especially in our teenage years, when our intellectual and deductive skills are growing keener, we begin to see the "real" state of affairs around us. We can see other people's faults and

A few definitions:

A **habit** is a regular pattern of acts.

A **virtue** is a good habit, an inner tendency to accomplish moral good.

A **vice** is a bad habit, an inner tendency to accomplish moral evil.

Character is the combination of our virtues and vices.



weaknesses, and our ideal image of others goes through some dramatic and irreversible changes.

During this period of our lives an attitude of cynicism is often in competition with our idealistic views. Many of our dreams seem to shatter. We see confusion and corruption where we once saw stability and honesty. We see hypocrisy and deceit where we once saw integrity and loyalty. Is it any wonder that at times we feel confused or hopeless?

This shift in our perception usually takes place in our teenage years, but the effects of it may last a lifetime. The choices we make during this time can have a deep impact on our character and view of the world. Likewise, our success and effectiveness in life are largely determined by those choices.

Perhaps this is the main task that each of us faces now — to understand ourselves and to choose the way we'll be able to follow for all our life.

For Your Journal



Who am I?

Write a letter to an unknown person. Introduce yourself and tell who you are. Describe your appearance, background, activities, interests, and concerns. You might include something about where you live, work, or go to school (the environment in which you spend your time) as well as the significant people in your life.

Read the letter back to yourself, imagining you are the stranger who has received the letter. Write down your reactions to the letter.

To Be Famous

by Boris Pasternak



To be famous is not in good taste.
That is not what will exalt us.
Don't build an archive, it's but a waste
To raise with manuscripts a fuss.

Creation calls for self-surrender
And not loud noise and cheap success.
Shame on the ignorant offender
Who lets all lips his fame confess.

Life must be lived without false face,
Lived so that in the final count
We draw unto ourselves love from space,
Hear the future call from the mount.

Some blank spaces should be left to chance
And not to this paper shuffling,
Not marking the margins in advance,
Places and chapters of nothing.

So plunge yourself in obscurity
And conceal there all of your tracks,
The way lands dissolve with surety
In the fog where vision lacks.

Others then will track your living trail,
Retracing step by step your feet,
But you must inevitably fail
To tell your triumph from defeat.

And you must not by a single hair
Retreat from their face, nor bend,
But be alive, alive your full share,
Alive and only 'til the end.

CHAPTER 2

Do You Want to be Happy?

Everyone without exception wants to be happy. The conscious or unconscious expectation of happiness, joy or satisfaction is implicit in all of our activities. No one ever goes to a party thinking, "I haven't had a miserable time for ages! Maybe tonight will be my chance. I hope the music will be awful, the food stale, the people boring, and I'll be attacked by some drunks on the way home!"

The idea of happiness as a universal pursuit is not new. In fact, more than 2,300 years ago the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote:

In view of the fact that all knowledge and every pursuit aims at some good, what is the highest of all goods achievable by action? Verbally there is very general agreement; for both the general run of men and people of superior refinement it is happiness; they identify living well and doing well with being happy.

Yet strangely, happiness seems to be one of those things that flee from us when we pursue it directly, and people who seek happiness just for its own sake rarely find it.

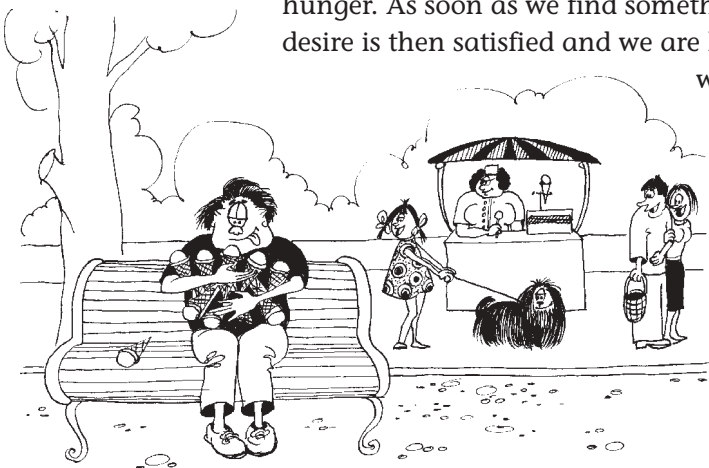
Chase a butterfly,
And it will flutter away.
Concentrate elsewhere,
It will land on your shoulder.

(Japanese haiku)

That's why it's important to know what the real source of happiness is and what is necessary in order to attain it. One way in which we experience happiness is when our desires are fulfilled. When we are hungry, we desire something to satisfy our hunger. As soon as we find something to eat, especially something we like to eat, our desire is then satisfied and we are happy. If there is someone we love, we yearn to be

with him or her. So when we finally meet, we feel very happy. Happiness is the natural result of the fulfillment of desire.

The question is, does the fulfillment of every desire make us happy? We know of some desires which when satisfied make us happy up to a certain point, but make us miserable if we don't stop at the right time. Almost everybody likes ice cream, for example, and just hearing the word may have already stimulated your desire to have some. Most people can easily eat one or



two ice cream cones and still want more. A few people might be able to devour five without feeling ill, but do you think there are many who can eat ten or even twenty ice cream cones without regretting it? We see then that one can have “too much of a good thing.”

What is more, there are desires which we should not try to satisfy at all, because even though we may experience through them a momentary feeling of “joy,” the long-term result is that we become deeply unhappy. Taking drugs is one obvious example, but consider also the times when you’ve done something you know in your heart is wrong. What you experience immediately is a kind of happiness, but it is tainted with a feeling of guilt which tends to remain long after the feeling of happiness has faded away.



For example, sometimes in the moment it feels good to shout at or curse somebody who has made us angry. Later we feel pretty awful about it and about ourselves for having spoken ugly words. But admittedly it’s often hard to resist the urge. A good part of growing up, in fact, involves learning to overcome these kinds of impulses so as to avoid the unfortunate consequences of them. Before we can, however, it’s important to be able to recognize which desires in the long run are healthy and good and which ones are unhealthy and damaging.

Still, there are many impulsive people who seek as much immediate pleasure as possible without thinking twice about it. In their minds, anything that is pleasurable — again, in the short term — is good, while that which causes them the slightest pain or unpleasantness is evil. They are living by what is called a “pleasure/pain principle,” by which ones tries to experience as much pleasure and as little pain in one’s life as one can. Common experience tells us, however, that a life of such pleasure-seeking rarely achieves real satisfaction, because the person probably has never asked himself seriously about the meaning or purpose of his life or what effect his actions have on others.

A big part of the problem is ignorance. We may not be sure which path in life will lead to lasting happiness. As a result, our desires can be corrupted or misdirected and their realization will cause us harm sooner or later. Often we lack a good sense of right and wrong when it comes to attaining true happiness. So we stumble around from one bad experience to another and wonder where is the way out. Usually, if we have a problem with our health, we can go to a doctor who can give an accurate diagnosis and prescribe the right treatment. But how about finding lasting happiness and peace of mind? Is there anyone to whom we can go who can really help us in this matter?

Physical happiness

If you think about it, there are actually two kinds of happiness: One is a physical or external happiness that we generally associate with our bodies. The other is happiness of the mind or inner happiness. It would be ideal if we could always experience both of them at the same time, but many times it’s not that way. We may feel good inside while reading an interesting book or while being together with close friends, but if suddenly we come down with some illness and must stay in bed, we

cannot feel completely happy. On the other hand, though we may be in perfect physical health, if we have hurt someone we care about or, for some other reason, are not at peace with ourselves, our happiness cannot be complete either.

Considering for the moment just our physical health, we realize that staying healthy means observing certain natural laws. We know it's important to eat the right foods, sleep well, keep warm, exercise and so on, but there are other kinds of laws that strongly affect your state of health:

- ✗ You're leaning over the balcony of your tenth floor apartment when you see your best friend, whom you've been longing to see all week, walking along the street. If you use the usual means to get downstairs, you may not have enough time to catch him. The quickest way, of course, is to jump, but the law of gravity predicts that if you do that you will die, most likely.
- ✗ You really like mushrooms but, for some reason, no one ever told you that some mushrooms are edible while others are quite poisonous. One day you go for a walk in the woods and you come upon a big patch of mushrooms. They look just like the ones your aunt collects, so you pick them and take them home. You then cook and eat them. A while later you're writhing in pain and have to be taken to the hospital to have your stomach pumped.
- ✗ Some of the earliest experiments with flight were failures because the first "aviators" simply didn't know the fundamentals of aerodynamics. They had to discover them the hard way, often at great expense to their health.



To grow up, stay healthy and have physical health and happiness, we should live in accordance with natural law. However, we are not born with knowledge of such things. We have innate desires and must learn the best way to fulfill them.

While there are some things that are only understood through trial and error, such as riding a bicycle, there are other things that allow us but one mistake, which is fatal. Some desires can never be realized, like unaided flight. Other desires are bad for us because they are excessive, like too much ice cream. Still other desires are wrong because they are premature, such as a two-year-old child wanting to cross a busy road by himself.

Throughout history in every society, people have tried to dispel ignorance by accumulating knowledge about how to survive and prosper in their environment. This knowledge was rightly treasured and passed on from generation to generation. Often this knowledge has taken the form of aphorisms such as "Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning; red sky at

night, sailors' delight." This pertains to survival at sea, but another people might share with us their special knowledge of how to survive in the jungle, in the desert or on the steppe.

Out of humankind's struggle to overcome its ignorance of nature and uncover nature's laws, science emerged. Scientists develop theories that are like maps. Maps attempt to describe as accurately as possible the territory, so that one can know what to expect around the next bend. This knowledge can be used to travel along the safest and quickest routes without getting lost. Scientific theories too can be used to enable human beings to accomplish their desires, whether to fly or to avoid dying of polio. It's important to recognize that it took several hundred years to acquire such knowledge, which today we are able to learn in school in just a few years.

If we are wise, we study hard and inherit from the work of others so that we don't have to waste time and effort rediscovering previous knowledge. Knowledge is often acquired only at a great price. Early medical researchers, for example, would experiment on themselves because they didn't want to endanger others. Sometimes they died during the experiment. Their colleagues could take note of the results without repeating the experiment or making the same mistakes. Isaac Newton, who first formulated the laws of gravity, admitted: "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." That is, he built or elaborated on the noble efforts of scientists who came before him.

As science uncovers new facts, people adjust their behavior accordingly. For example, when it was established that smoking is linked to lung cancer, many people stopped smoking. They realized that the temporary and immediate gratification of smoking was outweighed by the prospect of future physical suffering and a shorter lifespan.

Inner happiness

The same applies to our inner health, happiness and well-being. To grow into spiritually mature and psychologically healthy persons, we also need a map of our inner world and of human relationships. Just as a good map of a mountain range indicates which paths are dangerous, a map of our interior world will warn us of which ways to avoid. If we make mistakes that hurt the feelings of those we love, we may damage our self-respect and the trust of those we care about. Sometimes the damage can be healed and we end up just a little wiser. Sometimes, though, the psychological damage lasts a lifetime and the emotional wound never heals. The effect is not always obvious, but the person's inner world is diminished by the experience.

We can affirm that there are certain ways of relating that promote healthy emotional growth and other ways that are unhealthy, ultimately causing pain and unhappiness. As we will see throughout this book, spiritual and moral laws exist which are more than just a matter of personal opinion or some old-fashioned social convention. In other words, you cannot just choose or invent spiritual laws at whim any more than you can change the laws of physics. Human experience tells us that spiritual laws are as real as those that govern the natural world, even if the results are not immediately seen. Conversely, just as we know that our body functions best when it lives in harmony with the laws of nature, so also our mind remains healthy and happy when it is in harmony with spiritual law.

At this point, most of us have what we need to be minimally physically healthy. Maybe some of you know how to drive a car

A wise person learns
from the mistakes of
others.

A person with common
sense learns from his
own mistakes.

A fool never learns.

already or even hold a job. Some things come naturally, but to be most effective or to do things correctly involves a learning process. To be strong and healthy, to be wealthy or knowledgeable requires us to gain special skills and understanding. These don't happen automatically.

We can learn to satisfy our emotional desire for love and friendship in the same manner. Making good relationships requires that we develop personal virtues, alongside practical knowledge on how to relate well with others. We learn about spiritual laws in much the same way as we learn about physical laws: partly from direct experience and partly from the experience of others — from our parents, our teachers, books, etc. In addition, spiritual knowledge relies heavily on the example of others, on intuition, and on the social and cultural norms that we've grown up with. Historically, religions have been the wellsprings of much wisdom, since they deal with notions of life's origins, purpose, death and destiny. Religion is integral to all human cultures. Whether we are believers or not, religions still have many valuable insights on the path to attaining spiritual health and happiness. In this book we will draw upon a few of the world's great religious traditions as wellsprings of spiritual understanding.

Happiness and pleasure

In the history of thought, philosophers have grappled with questions about happiness and the meaning of human existence.

Some people think that happiness comes from living a life of pleasure. Yet, surely isn't there more to living the good life than this? Another Greek philosopher, Socrates, is famous for saying, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Ignoring this ancient wisdom, British philosopher Jeremy Bentham thought that since pleasure was the source of happiness, any pleasure was preferable to pain, and therefore gambling was at least as valuable as poetry. His successor, John Stuart Mill, responded by saying:

It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question.

Can you think of any values or purposes for which a person might be willing to endure pain or even risk his life?

This raises another important question: Is it possible to be happy without being good? Can one live a life preoccupied with the needs of oneself and feel deeply satisfied in the end? Aristotle believed that happiness was intrinsically related to living a virtuous life. All of us are familiar with examples of those who sacrificed their lives for the sake of love — love for another person, love of family, love of country. Even those examples should be enough to convince us that happiness and pleasure do not always coincide with each other. One can experience pleasure even in committing a crime, but genuine happiness appears to be more refined, possible only within the bounds of goodness.

The way to happiness

Our path to happiness depends on our knowledge of those principles that operate in the world of nature and the world of the spirit.

Consider the following metaphors:

A fleet of ships is sailing from Ontario to San Francisco. The voyage will be successful only if each ship is seaworthy with its engine in good operating condition,



and also if the ships do not collide with one another or get in each other's way. The two, in fact, are related, for if their steering mechanisms are faulty, they will not be able to avoid colliding, and, of course, if the ships keep colliding they will not remain seaworthy for long. If instead of San Francisco the fleet ends up in Singapore, the voyage cannot be deemed successful either. Seaman-ship, then, is fundamentally concerned with three things: keeping the ship in good condition, staying on course and arriving safely at the final destination.

By analogy, to conduct our life successfully means to maintain our moral and spiritual health, while keeping a clear vision of where we are going and how to get there, and finally to persevere until our goal is reached.

Returning to our map analogy, we realize that if you want to find your way through an unfamiliar mountain range, a map of the area is very helpful. The more accurate and recent the map, the easier your journey should be. An old and inaccurate map may be worse than useless, for it may give you a feeling of false confidence while leading you in the wrong direction. The result could be fatal. A good map will include information about dangers to look out for and paths to avoid. A travel guide is also useful, as it takes into account the experiences of previous travelers to the area.

For achieving real happiness too, many maps and guides are available — some very good ones and some not-so-good ones. We believe we have chosen from some of the most reliable sources of moral wisdom in writing this book — religious, philosophical and psychological — and our hope is that the book itself can be a most useful map to help you on your journey. Have a successful one!

For Your Journal



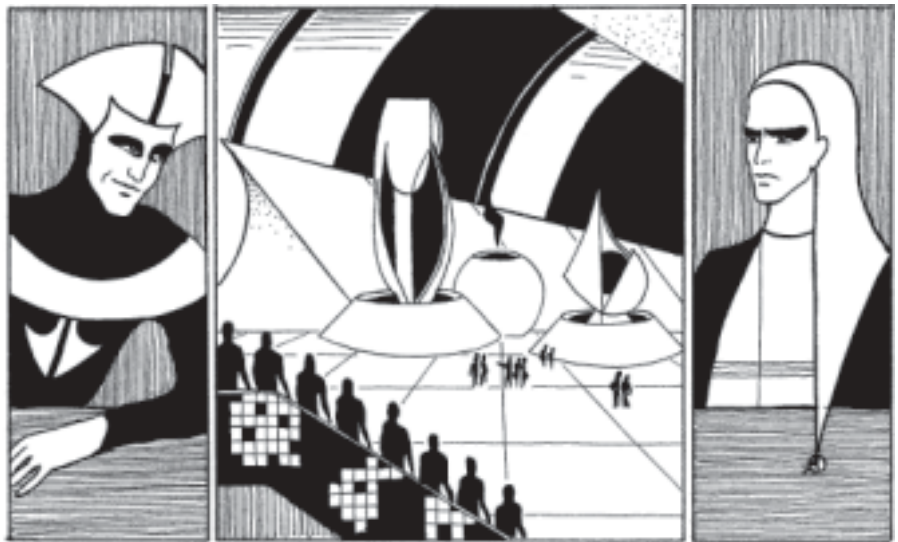
What Makes You Happy?

Make a list of 20 things that make you happy. Now write an imaginary life story including doing all the things you have on your list.

The Right to Be Unhappy

In his novel *Brave New World*, set in the not-too-distant future, Aldous Huxley explores the question of what is most important in life: pleasure or integrity.

London has become a society based upon the assumption that pleasure is the highest good and the source of happiness. All the sufferings and problems that are a normal part of life have been banished since everything is planned and predictable. So there are no social or economic problems. Medical technology allows people to be genetically designed, created in test tubes and brought up in conditioning centers where they learn how to behave. They are assigned to particular jobs that are suitable for their personality. Since everything



is taken care of they don't have to worry about anything. They are free from responsibility. To avoid the pain that accompanies intimate relationships, no one marries or has deep friendships, but there is free sex for all. If a person gets bored there are games to kill time, and any doubts or tinges of unhappiness can be instantly dismissed with a dose of the intoxicant soma.

The Savage, John, is born "by accident" and brought up in an Indian village outside of "civilization". He returns to London but as a free man cannot accept the values he finds there. He feels there is more to life than soma and sex. His unorthodox thinking and behavior attracts a couple of "intellectuals" and bring him to the attention of the authorities. Towards the end of the book there is a meeting between the Savage, his two friends and Mustapha Mond, the Controller.



To read

Brave New World, by Aldous Huxley

CHAPTER 3

The Way to Know Yourself

Who am I?

Have you ever looked into the mirror and wondered who is that person looking back at you? Did you ever think about how complex you are as a living human being? Have you ever imagined yourself as a very different person? Do you ever dream about the great potential that lies within you or consider all the different qualities that go into making you what you are?

We want to understand ourselves, both the qualities that make us human and those determining our individuality. We desire to transcend the routine of our daily lives and reach into a realm seldom explored — the realm of self-knowledge. Only then can we better understand other people and the life that surrounds us; only then will we be able to reach the goals that we have set for our lives.

How to begin to understand our inner life

The beginning of self-knowledge is awareness — that is, becoming aware of the things you do and your reasons for doing them. We can begin to explore life with this focus, either by examining our thoughts or by being more conscious of our actions and the way others relate to us (more on this later).

Imagine that you have the assignment to get to know someone whom you have never met before. If you were meeting that person for the first time, how would you begin the conversation? Let's say you were able to visit his home while he was away. You could look around and tell something about his likes and dislikes, his habits and lifestyle. What is his home like? Is it neat and tidy or messy or something in between? What do you feel in being there? Does it have a warm and welcoming atmosphere, a dark and dismal feeling, or is it nondescript? What colors do you notice? How are the walls decorated? What kinds of books does he read? Do you see any photos of his family or friends on a wall or a table, or do posters of popular rock and movie stars predominate?

Now imagine that you will spend a few hours with this person. You don't want to ask him questions directly about himself. You would rather discover things indirectly by observing how he reacts to you and others. What does he look like? How would you describe his facial expressions? What can you deduce about his inner feelings? Does he look you in the eyes when he speaks or does he look away? Does he look at his watch



when you are talking to him? What does his voice sound like? Do you think he really means what he is saying?

Imagine that you and he are waiting together for a bus for thirty minutes in a snowstorm; how does this person act? Does he become upset that the bus is late and start to complain, or does he ignore the inconvenience? When you part, how does he say goodbye to you? What is your overall impression of this person?

Imagine now that you have to write several paragraphs about the way this person thinks. Of course, you don't really know how he thinks, but based on your observations and the experiences you've had with him, what would you write? Do you have any idea what he thinks about, what kind of mind he has? Do you believe that his thoughts and his actions are related? What could you conclude, from his actions, about what is going on in his mind?

You could actually do this exercise-if you have the endurance and curiosity. In fact, we do this kind of thing all the time, though we may not be conscious of it. We are constantly evaluating whether a person is trustworthy, intelligent or interesting by observing the way he behaves. Finally, we judge a person's character not only from what we observe directly but also from what others say about him.

The same holds true for us as well. Other people judge us according to the way we

act, which in turn is determined by our attitude and way of thinking. All of this creates an image of us in the eyes of our family, friends, acquaintances and even passers-by on the street. So, if we want to understand who we are, then perhaps it would be wise to start by attentively observing ourselves, to understand how we appear in the eyes of others. This is the starting point of self-awareness.

What Do I Think?



An exercise for the mind

There are many ways to look at your thoughts and the way in which you have developed particular thinking patterns. One exercise which may help you to see what you think about is as follows: Sit in a quiet place, in a comfortable position. For several minutes focus your attention only on your breathing. Take a deep breath in and exhale slowly. Do this repeatedly. As you focus on your breathing, try not to think about anything. You will soon find that many thoughts come to you. Try not to allow the thoughts to develop any particular significance. Let them flow in and out, like a gentle breeze carrying autumn leaves. Do this for several minutes. At the end of the exercise immediately write down as many passing thoughts as possible. Don't worry how important or unimportant they are; just write down everything you remember. Now reflect over the notes you have taken. What did you think about? Are these thoughts common to you? Were you aware that so many thoughts appeared in your mind? What does this exercise tell you about yourself?

Getting to know yourself

You can begin to understand something about yourself through many different ways.. One of the quickest is by exploring the way you think. Every second of every day hundreds of thoughts are running through your mind — some which you respond to; others which you may just barely recognize. What do you think about and how do you think? Do you generally think good things about others, or do you usually find fault with or mistrust others? Do you tend to see the good in a situation or do you complain a lot? What do you think about yourself? Do you usually think about your weaknesses and problems or about your good side? Do you ever try to think about another person's situation, or try to imagine yourself in someone else's position?

If we compare the difficulty of knowing another person to that of knowing ourselves, we can see that it is easier to discover real information about ourselves. We not only have our actions as well as others' attitudes toward us to review, we have our own conscience and intuitions that confirm the truthfulness of our own thoughts and motivation. Because of this special benefit we should be able to know who we are better than anyone else. We could say that besides knowing the "what" and the "how" about my actions, I can also know the most important thing, the "why."

Thinking and doing: cause and effect

The idea that your thinking is directly connected to your behavior and health is not new. Many philosophers and thinkers have explored this connection on their own course of self-discovery. Many look upon the relationship between thinking and doing as one of cause and effect. In other words, the way one acts is the result of the way one thinks. That seems like a reasonable statement, but because we can't see others' thoughts, their behavior may surprise us at times. For example, if a boy who never stole anything in his life suddenly becomes a thief, stealing everything in sight, his family and friends would be shocked. However, it is possible that this boy entertained thoughts of stealing for some time before finally acting upon his thoughts, as is often the case with criminals.

On the positive side, an honest man who generally acts in a good way similarly does so because of his thinking. Because he has thought well of others, he has cultivated the habit of treating them with respect. If he holds a view of himself as capable and intelligent, he will likely pursue a career he enjoys and in which he can advance. If he thinks of his wife as a tender, caring person, he is more likely to trust her with his deep feelings and share openly with her. Of course, there are many other factors involved in these examples. Nevertheless, the way a person thinks plants very important seeds for the kind of life he will lead.

Fortunately, we can change our thinking, if we decide that we don't like the way we're thinking. We are by no means destined to a life of unfulfilled dreams and negative behaviors. In fact, just by changing our thinking, in a moment we can change our mood, our situation, even our life. It's not uncommon for people to wake up in a bad mood: "Oh no, not another day! This is going to be the worst day of my life, for sure. I feel terrible. I have that awful class, and have to play in that blasted hockey game tonight." Our experience of the whole day can be affected by the way we begin it. Suppose that instead, the same person wakes up saying, "This is going to be a fantastic day — the best day of my life! I feel great! I'm going to study hard today and play my best ever in tonight's game." Isn't it funny how the quality of life can be determined by just such a simple change of attitude?

Positive thinking: a tool for building good character

Finding the good in every person and in every circumstance is not easy; if it were, everyone would do it. We tend more often to notice a person's flaws or the problems with a given set of circumstances. As with everything else, thinking in a positive way is something that has to be learned, and it takes time to become good at it.

You may begin by pretending for a couple of days that you are on an undercover mission. You have to notice and write down three good things about the characters of two of your classmates whom you regard as the most difficult to get along with (it may even be a teacher or someone in your family!). At the end of the day read through your notes at least two times. Consider three good things about your own character as well. The next day when you see these people again, review in your mind the good qualities you've noted, especially when their behavior appears offensive. This is a good test of your self-control. Try to ignore those critical thoughts and feelings in that moment, and think instead of the things that you wrote about them.

Through this simple exercise we can see that it is not always easy to focus on the good in people or in our surroundings. When we do, we feel ourselves changing for the better. It's possible

By the right choice and true application of thought man ascends to the Divine Perfection; by the abuse and wrong application of thought, he descends below the level of the beasts. Between these two extremes are all the grades of character, and man is their maker and master.

— James Allen
British philosopher

therefore to train yourself how to think, and thus determine your own state of mind.

To really understand ourselves, it is helpful to see from the perspective of where we came from, where we are and where we are going. Within this context of past, present and future the reason for our lives and the meaning of important events in our lives often become clearer.

Where do I come from?

Every individual is at the same time a human being and a unique being unlike any other human being who has ever lived. In addition, each of us was born from the union of a man and a woman, our parents, who in turn were born from a similar union. So, while we are unique human beings, we are also intimately a part of those who gave us birth, inheriting not only elements of their physical features but also elements of their character. If you know your grandparents well, you may have noticed many of their features — physical and spiritual — in your parents and even in yourself. If you were to delve into your ancestry a few generations back, you might recognize some qualities — noble and ignoble — that are common in some of your immediate family members. Therefore, while we may like to emphasize our uniqueness, it is also important to appreciate our connection to those who preceded us.

Where am I now?

Now imagine that your life is a movie and you are the star. What does your feature film — the movie about your life — look like? Some of the following questions may help you to determine this:

- ✗ How do I see myself?
- ✗ What are my character strengths?
- ✗ What are my character weaknesses?
- ✗ How do I generally see other people (in a good light or in a bad light)?
- ✗ What makes me work harder?
- ✗ What frustrates me?
- ✗ How do I relate to my friends and my family?
- ✗ How can I see what my values are (or were) by looking back over the decisions I made in the past?
- ✗ How do I react to stress or confrontations?
- ✗ Do my values change depending on whom I am with?



Where am I going?

The next — and possibly the most difficult — question we should ask ourselves is: “Where am I going?” Although some of us have a vague idea of the quality of person we want to become, few of us have a solid plan of how to go about it.

When we are uncertain, we are often pulled this way and that by circumstances. That is, instead of focusing on the object of our desire, we can be distracted by many things along the way.

To know where we are headed is a difficult task. To reach this point, we should develop an image of the kind of person we wish to become, and how we wish to develop our inner selves. What are we willing to sacrifice in order to reach this goal? Our answers will reveal what is really valuable to us.

Individual Exercises



- ✎ Go to a mirror after reading this chapter. Look yourself in the eyes (in the eyes, please! Don't look down or away). Talk to yourself out loud. First tell yourself three things you *don't* like about yourself. Now tell yourself three things that you *do* like about yourself—real compliments to you! You may feel awkward, but look at yourself and talk to you (yes, you). Don't look away.
- ✎ Look in the mirror, full length, if possible. Say nothing at first. Now try to adopt a warm, caring, compassionate, or at least, very friendly smile. Is your whole face smiling and radiant? Are your eyes soft, warm and tender?
- ✎ Switch to a remote, dispassionate, critical stare. Now look coldly and judgmentally. Now glare menacingly. How did each feel? Which came most naturally?
- ✎ The eyes are said to be the windows to the human spirit. What do your eyes tell you about your spirit?

Something to think about



With this understanding, we are led to consider the nature of the human being. Although we are all so different, could it be possible that there are common threads that hold us all together, similarities within the nature of man which are present in every person despite geographical location, nationality or family creed?

For Your Journal



"Treasure Map"

Close your eyes and ask: What is my buried treasure? What are the potential qualities that lie hidden within me? Using some kind of imagery, think of your buried treasure.

Draw a picture of your buried treasure. Then draw a map with a path leading to the treasure. The path is your life. Show the obstacles (blocks, hindrances) and the helpers (people, resources, assistance) you have encountered along the way. Label these if you wish.

Have a conversation with the obstacles and then with the helpers. Write down your conversation.

This is an excellent exercise for further exploring your latent talents, abilities and wishes. It can help you confront your limitations and make use of your resources toward reaching your goals.

Evening

by Ivan Bunin

We only recollect happiness,
But happiness is everywhere.
Maybe it is in that autumn garden,
In the clear air in the window.

In the fathomless skies a cloud
Lifts its light white edge.
I look at it... We know so little,
And happiness is given to those who know.

The window is open. A little bird
Alighted on the windowsill with a song.
I take away my weary look from the books.

It is evening, the sky is empty.
I hear the sound of a threshing-machine...
I see, I hear, I am happy. Everything is in me.



To read

Sophie's World, by Jostein Gaarder

CHAPTER 4

There Is More to Life Than Meets the Eye

There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

In studying a subject at school, we usually concentrate on a particular aspect of the world. In chemistry we investigate the principles that govern the interaction of different chemicals; in biology we study the principles of organization of living organisms; and in history we try to understand the pivotal events that led to the modern world. We seldom take the time to think about whether there are more general principles at the base of existence itself. What is the cause of the extraordinary harmony and order that we see all around us in the natural world? These questions usually fall into the area of philosophy. Here we will investigate what these principles might be.

As we mature, our view of the world is influenced by the family, society and culture that nurtured us. Our worldview acts both as a sieve and a window through which we experience and interpret the world. Some people believe that everything is in conflict and that progress comes through struggle. Others believe that everything is in harmony and that progress comes through cooperation. Some believe that there is no life after death and all that exists is the physical reality that can be comprehended through their five senses. Others believe that the physical world is an illusion and only the spiritual dimension is real. Each of these perspectives brings implications for the path of life that we follow as well as for our moral decisions and understanding.

Central to understanding the principles that lie behind the harmony of nature is a more fundamental question: What is life, and what is the essence of reality? Is it matter or spirit? If both, then how do they relate to each other?

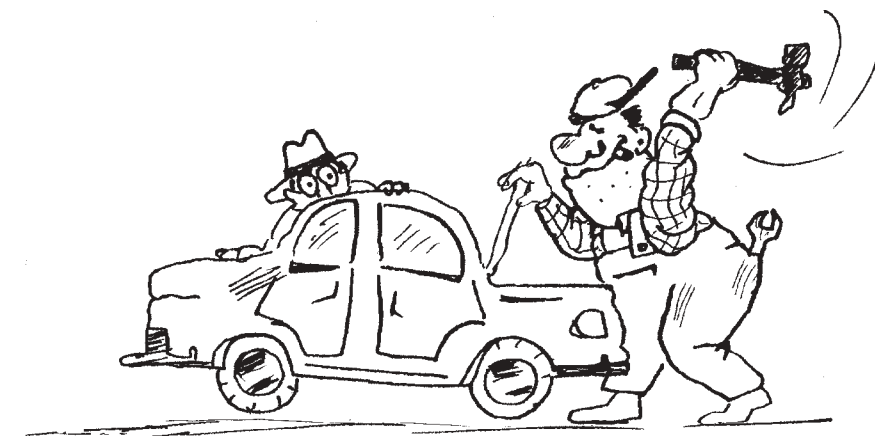
Inner nature and outer form

If we think about it, we will realize that every being has two aspects or dimensions that correspond to one another. One we may call the “inner nature,” the other the “outer form.” Here are some examples:

	Inner nature	Outer form
Human Being	Mind	Body
Animal	Instinct	Body
Plant	“Plant Mind”	Cells, Tissues
Mineral	Inherent Nature	Matter/Energy

It is important to understand how these two aspects are related to each other. We will examine this principle in more detail below.

Invisible and visible



A driver with engine trouble is standing at the edge of the road. A repairman arrives, opens the hood, and investigates the trouble. Then he seizes a hammer and gives the engine a strong blow and the engine starts running again. The driver is amazed. But he is even more amazed when the man asks \$100 for the repairs. On the bill he reads:

1 hammer blow	\$ 5.00
"Know how"	\$95.00
TOTAL:	\$100.00

You might think that this is an example of exploitation, but it shows that knowledge, though intangible, is valuable. Some people say, "I only believe in things that are real and verifiable." But if we think about it, there are many things that are

real which we cannot touch, such as love, beauty, X-rays and knowledge. Can we see knowledge or put it in a bag? No, it is invisible. Often it can be communicated by words or symbols, as in arithmetic. Often it cannot. For example, what does it mean to learn to drive a car? Suppose you memorize a driving manual. Would you then know how to drive? No. Knowledge has to become grounded in experience. It has to become part of yourself. A soccer player doesn't master his sport by sitting in an armchair reading but by practicing the techniques he has read or been shown. Although they are invisible, knowledge and skills are very valuable.

Another way to understand this is to examine language. Words themselves are bearers of meaning. While one can see a word if it is written down, or hear it if it is spoken, meanings are invisible and intangible. Yet the whole purpose of language is to convey meaning. Words are arranged in a sentence in a particular order so as to convey meaning. When we read a novel by Tolstoy, we can analyze his use of language, grammar and literary form, but if we stop there we miss an important dimension of the book. Likewise, artists struggle to use the medium in which they work to convey their deepest thoughts. So it is the invisible aspect of a thing that determines its value.

The same principle applies to human character. A woman may be physically beautiful but also vain, dishonest, manipulative and selfish. Another woman may be rather plain or even unattractive but also modest, honest, sincere and unselfish. Many people are not good judges of character and do not know how to assess and



value a person. They judge superficially and inappropriately, looking only at the outer form (the body), and fail to realize the critical role that the inner character (the mind) plays in deciding how the outer form will behave. In Shakespeare's words: *"All that glitters is not gold."*

Thinking generally about life, we should remember that there is an invisible aspect to everything that cannot be fully explained in terms of the visible aspect. In fact, it is this invisible aspect that guides and gives meaning to the visible actions that are verified by our senses. In a similar way, it is the invisible mind that guides an author in the way he uses language and enables us to decipher the black marks on the white paper to understand the author's meaning.

Order and chaos



Suppose that you have done exceptionally well at school and are to graduate with honors. Your parents promise to buy you a watch for doing so well. How would you feel if they gave you a small bag of gray powder? Hurt? Perplexed? "But," your parents tell you, "it is the finest watch powder." It is a mixture of steel powder, gold powder, and ruby powder all in the necessary proportions for a watch.

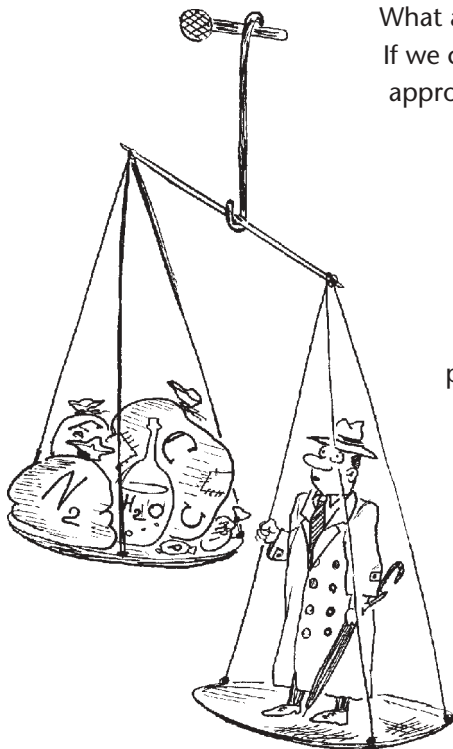
If your parents gave you such a present, you would quickly realize that they had a worldview very different from yours. So what is the difference between the watch and the watch powder? Materially they are the same. The difference is qualitative: the method and manner in which this matter is arranged, the function of the watch, its ability to tell time, and the creative investment of energy by the watchmaker. A specific purpose guided the making of the watch that began

with a design concept in the creator's mind. This design concept determined the shape and structure of the watch. It is the design that adds value. Compare the value of a well-designed car and a badly designed car. They may both be made up of the same raw materials, but they are different, and it is the quality of design that makes the difference.

Another example could be taken from the world of minerals. The element carbon can exist in several quite different forms such as coal, graphite, and diamond. The carbon atoms in a lump of coal and a diamond are identical. Yet the first is very soft, black, dull, plentiful, and cheap, while the second is very hard, clear, dazzling, rare, and expensive. Imagine what would happen if a man gave his wife a lump of coal instead of a diamond on their fiftieth wedding anniversary! It is not the atoms themselves that determine its value, but the way in which the atoms are arranged. The visible external structure is a reflection of the invisible internal structure.

The invisible inner aspect is the organizing principle that allows the visible outer form to resemble its expression. Thus, the emotions we feel are expressed on our faces: When we are happy, we smile; when we are sorrowful, we cry. Our attitudes are clearly revealed through our "body language." Since this is the case, we can learn and understand a lot about a person's character by studying his behavior and mannerisms. In much the same way, scientists try to uncover the hidden laws that govern nature by studying the phenomena they encounter.

Nothing but . . .



What are human beings made of? Let's assume you weigh around 70 kg. If we could separate you out into your constituent elements, this is approximately what you would find:

45.4 kg oxygen
12.7 kg carbon
6.8 kg hydrogen
2 kg nitrogen
1 kg calcium
700 g phosphorus

plus a few grams of potassium, sulfur, sodium, chlorine, magnesium, iron and zinc; with traces of copper, manganese, molybdenum, cobalt, selenium and other elements.

If one calculated the value of the chemicals that make up a human being, it would come to about \$2. Is that how much you are worth? If not, why not? What is it that determines the value of a human being? What is it that animates these chemicals? Are we “nothing but” a collection of chemicals? Are our thoughts nothing more than a series of neural discharges wholly explicable by physiology?

Likewise, consider the fact that many languages consist of sentences that are merely collections of letters of the alphabet. Compare the two collections of letters below:

heter si a oopinvoss kneas dbenih ovv
and,
there is a poisonous snake behind you

What is the difference? There is the same set of letters in both cases. The order in which the second set of letters is arranged results in the second sentence conveying a meaning that can be understood by the reader. A new property has emerged — the meaning of the sentence. Likewise, if the two gases hydrogen and oxygen are combined, they form water, which has the property of “wetness” not possessed by the gases. We can see that sometimes the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Thus, while it is true that we are composed of chemicals, we are much more than “the sum of our parts.” The same individual can be “explained” at different levels:

- ✗ the level of protons, electrons and neutrons (physics)
- ✗ the level of atoms and molecules (chemistry)
- ✗ the level of cells (biology)
- ✗ the level of organs (physiology)
- ✗ the level of persons (psychology, the social sciences and the humanities)

No single level of explanation is complete. To completely understand an individual, one has to take into consideration all these levels and others, too. The first two levels are explained in terms of the laws of physics and chemistry. When it comes to the following stages, we find that there are biological and physiological phenomena that cannot be explained by physics and chemistry alone. And, of course, to understand a human being, we have to study such things as psychology, the social sciences and the humanities.

Steps of life

We have arrived at the conclusion that every being has two dimensions. The first is invisible and intangible and determines the shape of the second, which is visible and tangible. But this is not all. Knowledge cannot develop when there is no medium to carry it. The value of the design concept emerges as its being comes to its full realization.

There is yet another invisible dimension to consider: the essence of “life” itself.

Autonomy is a distinctive feature of life. The word “autonomy” comes from the Greek words *autos*, meaning “self,” and *nomos*, meaning “law.” So, “autonomy” means “self-governing.” For example, if we consider a rock in the desert, we will see that its temperature varies. During the day it is very hot. At night it becomes very cold. A desert plant, by contrast, is able to maintain approximately the same temperature day and night. Thus, plants are alive in a way that minerals are not. They can adapt to a changing environment and maintain their integrity. They can, within a limited range, control and regulate what goes on within their organism, maintaining a kind of barrier against the changes in the environment. Autonomy in plants can be seen in their more sophisticated level of organization, possessing cells and tissues of a complex structure and form. This enables them to perform the functions of consumption, growth, and reproduction in which all living organisms engage.

Of course, autonomy is not an absolute principle. When environmental conditions become too extreme, living organisms die. As we examine species higher up the evolutionary ladder, we can see greater degrees of autonomy. Mammals and birds, being warm-blooded, are able to live in conditions of significant temperature changes, whereas insects need warmth for active movement. That is why in winter you may see a sparrow, but you will never see a butterfly flitting over the snowdrifts.

Looking at animals, we see that they function on a more complex level than plants. They have highly developed sensory organs and nervous systems that allow them to behave in an instinctually purposeful and interactive manner, enabling them to perform certain activities without forethought or training in specific skills. For example, a bird is able to build a nest without ever being taught. Also, scientists remain puzzled over the extraordinary navigational ability of migrating birds and fish.

Returning to ourselves, we recognize that human beings contain all the levels of organization seen in less developed forms of life. However, humans have an additional, higher level of organization that makes us qualitatively different from animals. Although animal instinct is remarkable, it is not free, which is why, despite their extraordinary navigational ability, birds always migrate to and from the same places. Birds do not decide to “take a holiday” in a new place! The human mind, though, is able to freely consider options and make decisions. People decide whether they will go on holiday or not, and whether, if they can afford it, to go abroad or travel close to home. The human mind is also extraordinarily creative. While birds’ nests and beehives exhibit a high level of organization, they are always the same. They are simply functional with little aesthetic input in their construction. By contrast, people use individual creativity to design and construct their homes, from mud huts to palaces. Whereas most organisms are restricted to a particular environment, humans can be found

A little black boy was watching the balloon man at a county fair. The man was evidently a good salesman, because he allowed a red balloon to break loose and soar high up in the air, thereby attracting a crowd of prospective young customers.

Next he released a blue balloon, then a yellow one, and a white one. They all went soaring up into the sky until they disappeared. The little black boy stood looking at the black balloon for a long time, and then asked, “Sir, if you sent the black one up, would it go as high as the others?”

The balloon man gave the boy an understanding smile. He snapped the string that held the black balloon in place and, as it soared upward, said, “It isn’t the color, son. It’s what’s inside that makes it rise.”



living in every kind of environment, from the tundra to the desert, from the ocean to outer space.

It is this ability to freely choose and realize unique interpretations of our desires that makes a human a moral being. Because we can choose, we are responsible for the consequences of our choices. For this reason, we sometimes have regrets. We know we could have acted differently. We are able to consider our thoughts and actions as being either good or bad. Animals are not judged with the ethical yardstick by which we judge one another. We recognize that animals are not moral agents and are not responsible for what they do in the same way that people are. A vicious dog may be put to death, but it is the owner who is held responsible for its behavior and for the harm it has inflicted on others.

Let us remember that neither the internal nor the external aspect can exist without the other. For every event that has an explanation in natural terms, there is also an invisible dimension underlying the reason why it happened. This is what gives rise to the possibility of meaning. The inner dimension of motivation, for example, guides and influences one's response to the environment. This internal dimension is recognized as the primary force for existence as it determines the quality and meaning of life.

For Your Journal



My inner and outer self

Ask yourself this question: *What do my inner and outer selves look and feel like at this time in my life?* Think of your inner self as your internal, private world of emotional feelings, fantasies, memories, wishes, and thoughts.

Your outer self is the part of you that you show to the outside world, the ways in which you express yourself for others to see: your interests and activities, behavior, accomplishments, appearance, environment. Close your eyes and reflect on your inner and outer selves.

Some images may have come to you that reflect the quality of your inner and outer aspects at this time. They may be contrasting. For instance, you may feel very active inside, with many thoughts and feelings buzzing around. Your external world, on the other hand, may seem quiet, calm, or even dull.

Draw an expression of your inner and outer selves. Use any style that feels right for you: doodles, images, symbols, and pictures. You may express your inner and outer aspects in one drawing, or it may seem more appropriate to use two separate pages.

Afterwards, look at what you have drawn. On your next journal page, write your impressions, thoughts, and feelings about what your graphic expression "says" to you.

Visions and Ideals

From As a Man Thinketh, by James Allen

The dreamers are the saviors of the world. As the visible world is sustained by the invisible, so men, through all their trials and sins and sordid vocations, are nourished by the beautiful visions of their solitary dreamers. Humanity cannot forget its dreamers; it cannot let their ideals fade and die; it lives in them; it knows them as the realities which it shall one day see and know.

Composer, sculptor, painter, poet, prophet, sage, these are the makers of the afterworld. the architects of heaven. The world is beautiful because they have lived; without them, laboring humanity would perish.

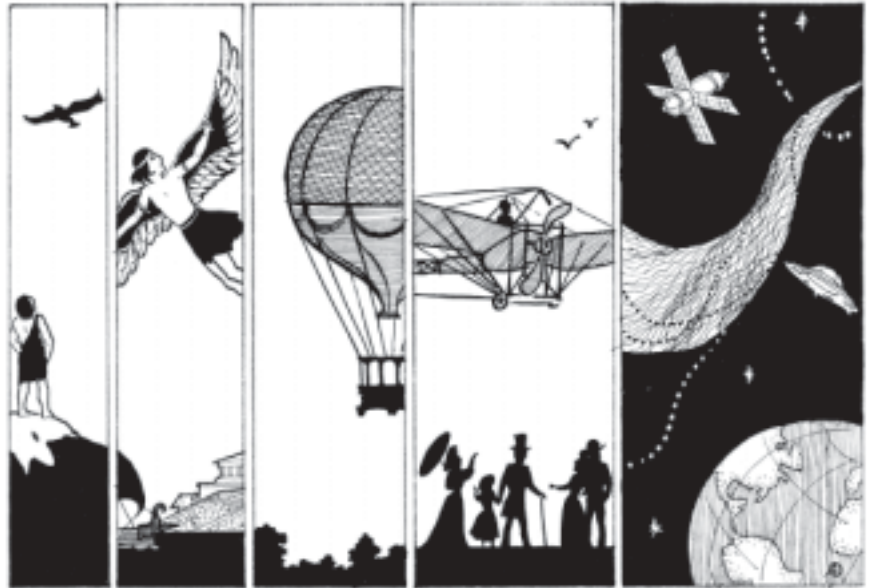
He who cherishes a beautiful vision, a lofty ideal in his heart, will one day realize it. Columbus cherished a vision of another world, and he discovered it; Copernicus fostered the vision of a multiplicity of worlds and a wider universe and he revealed it; Buddha beheld the vision of a spiritual world of stainless beauty and perfect peace, and he entered into it.

Cherish your visions; cherish your ideals; cherish the music that stirs in your heart, the beauty that forms in your mind, the loveliness that drapes your purest thoughts, for out of them will grow all delightful conditions, all heavenly environment; of these, if you but remain true to them, your world will at last be built.

To desire is to obtain; to aspire is to achieve. Dream lofty dreams, and as you dream, so shall you become. Your Vision is the promise of what you shall one day be; your Ideal is the prophecy of what you shall at last unveil

The greatest achievement was at first and for a time a dream. The oak sleeps in the acorn; the bird waits in the egg; and in the highest vision of the soul a waking angel stirs. Dreams are the seedlings of realities.

And you, too, youthful reader, will realize the Vision (not the idle wish) of your heart. Into your hands will be placed the exact results of your own thoughts; you will receive that which you earn; no more, no less. Whatever your present environment may be, you will fall, remain, or rise with your thoughts, your Vision, your Ideal. In the beautiful words of Stanton Kirkham Davis, "You may be keeping accounts, and presently you shall walk out of the door that for so long has seemed to you the barrier of your ideals, and shall find yourself before an audience – the pen still behind your ear, the ink stains on your fingers – and then and there shall pour out the torrent of your inspirations. You may be driving sheep and you shall wander to the city – bucolic and open-mouthed; shall wander under the intrepid guidance of the spirit into the studio of the master, and after a time he shall say, "I have nothing more to teach you". And now you have become the master, who did so recently dream of great things while driving sheep. You shall lay down the saw and the plane to take upon yourself the regeneration of the world".



The thoughtless, the ignorant, and the indolent, seeing only the apparent effects of things and not the things themselves, talk of luck, of fortune, and chance. Seeing a man grow rich, they say, "How lucky he is!" Observing another become intellectual, they exclaim, "How highly favored he is!" And noting the saintly character and wide influence of another, they remark, "How chance aids him at every turn!" They do not see the trials and failures and struggles which these men have voluntarily encountered in order to gain their experience; have no knowledge of the sacrifices they have made, of the undaunted efforts they have put forth, of the faith they have exercised, that they might overcome the apparently insurmountable, and realize the Vision of their heart. They do not know the darkness and the heartaches; they only see the light and joy, and call it "luck"; do not see the long and arduous journey, but only behold the pleasant goal, and call it "good fortune"; do not understand the process, but only perceive the result, and call it "chance".

In all human affairs there are efforts, and there are results, and the strength of the effort is the measure of the result. Chance is not. "Gifts", powers, material, intellectual, and spiritual possessions are the fruits of effort; they are thoughts completed, objects accomplished, visions realized.

The Vision that you glorify in your mind, the Ideal that you enthrone in your heart – this you will build your life by, this you will become.

CHAPTER 5

The World of Relationships

No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the mainland; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

— John Donne, English poet

Have you ever thought about what processes make this world an integrated entity? What causes particles to form atoms and molecules, and people to form a human community? What is the fundamental principle and dynamic on which the world stands?

Why don't people dream of spending their lives in solitude? Why are their relationships with other people and things so important?

Nothing in the surrounding world exists by itself, neither in nothingness, nor in isolation. Everywhere we see the dynamism of interaction permeating our world and forming an organic whole, a vibrant unity. The process of interrelationships among elements, and the connection to the organic whole, function as a most fundamental principle of the world's activity.



Things or relationships?

For a long time people have speculated about the nature of reality. The ancient Greeks came up with several ideas:

- ✕ Thales suggested that everything was made of water, since water could exist as vapor, liquid, or solid.
- ✕ Pythagoras thought that numbers were the essence of reality.
- ✕ Democritus proposed that everything was made up of atoms (meaning “indivisible”).

In the nineteenth century scientists agreed that the best explanation of reality was that everything is composed of atoms, which were thought to be small, indivisible, solid balls. However, in the twentieth century the atom was “split” into more fundamental particles. More recently, scientists have discovered that, depending on experimental conditions, these particles can behave as waves of energy. Finally, they have determined that it is the different forms of relationships (“forces”) within matter and energy that are most primary and that nothing can be understood or explained except by referring to these relationships. Everything is composed of elements in relationship to one another. Each thing’s existence is determined by the relationships both within it and between it and other things.

In human life, also, relationships are of primary importance. Imagine a car. What do you think about it? What you think and feel about it depends on the nature of your relationship with it. For example: if it is exhibited in a car dealer’s showroom, if you will never see it, if you own it, if someone you envy owns it, if you are a passenger in it, or if it is about to run you over.

A person’s happiness and well-being depends on:

- ✗ the relationship among the different organs of his physical body; the relationship between his mind and body; and the relationship among the different parts of his character, such as his intellect, emotion and will;
- ✗ the relationship he has with his parents, siblings, friends, and other people with whom he associates;
- ✗ the relationship he has with the environment that he inhabits and the things that he owns (or doesn’t own).

This is why almost no one wants to spend his whole life in solitude, without human contact. Who we are is in so many ways defined by the relationships we have formed.

Human society is composed of the relationships among individuals, families, groups, businesses, associations, and nations. In fact, if we tried to diagram the interactions among all these different components of society, the picture would be quite complex.

Absolute equality?

Let us discuss a few important principles according to which relationships appear and develop.

First of all, the word “relationship” itself implies the presence of at least two separate elements, or partners, which come into interaction. One of the elements is the subject partner, recognized by its leading position, initiating the relationship; the other is the object partner, recognized by its dynamic response to the initiative of the subject.

In all relationships this subject and object dynamic can be recognized. Why? What is the difference between the relative positions of subject and object? Are these roles and functions equal? Exchangeable? Can anyone or anything play the subject role?

In considering these questions, let us look at some examples:

- ✗ **The planetary system.** At the center is the sun, around which all the planets revolve. The moon revolves around the earth. We can recognize that the sun is in the subject position, while the planets



are in the object position, responding to the gravitational pull of the sun. The earth, while in the object position to the sun, is itself in the subject position with respect to the moon. What would happen if one of the planets left its orbit?

- ✕ **A conversation.** During a conversation there are speaker (subject) and listener (object) positions. These are fluid positions transferring dynamically from one party to the other. Can we say that there is a conversation if two people are speaking simultaneously? No. Rather we would call that scenario an argument.
- ✕ **A lecture.** The teacher's position as subject makes no sense unless there are students in the object position to learn, receive and respond to the information given. A teacher can fulfill his or her role only when there are students to be taught. What happens if, between teacher and student, there are no clear subject and object roles?
- ✕ **A family.** The parent-child relationship requires clear roles and responsibilities. Parents, in the subject position, give love and care to the children, who are in the object position. However, later in life, children may care for their elderly parents, and the subject and object roles in the relationship are reversed. In a family, the purpose and direction of love determine the subject-object dynamic.

Thus, we come to the conclusion that understanding the proper roles of subject and object is necessary for there to be order and harmony. The point is not that a particular person or thing has to be in the subject position, but that without these roles being filled, nothing can exist and nothing can be accomplished. Is the subject position more valuable or more important than the object position? No, they have equal value. They are necessary for each other and for the existence of the relationship. They belong together and to each other. Together they make up a larger whole, a higher level of existence. Thus, protons and electrons combine to form atoms, atoms combine to form molecules, molecules to form minerals and the complex molecules that form the basis of life. A nucleus and cytoplasm combine to form a cell, cells to form an organism, organisms to form systems, and so on. Everything is part of a great chain of being.

Similar patterns exist in human relationships. There is no conversation if only one of the partners speaks. A lecture isn't successful if the lecturer doesn't take into consideration his students. As the partner initiating love, parents seek to bring their children into unity with them. Through the process of giving and receiving love, the subject and object roles come into unity and equal partnership.

The harmonious interaction of subject and object leads to a new creation and the emergence of value. Accordingly, entities are formed as action and development occurs through cooperative and complementary interactions. Subject and object are necessary for each other and serve each other. Each is fulfilled through their unity and finds its value through participating in this unity while maintaining an individual existence. Each position finds satisfaction in supporting the other, and the value of each is enhanced. Love is the leading force that brings together subject and object. In fact, without subject and object roles, love cannot flow and develop freely. The positions of subject and object exist to allow for the vitality and development of other-centered love.

Complementary relationships



In the previous chapter we saw that everything has both an inner and outer dimension. But there is another type of complementary relationship present in our universe. Have you ever noticed that everything exists in pairs of polarity that exhibit mutual attraction? At the most basic level, all particles come in pairs, such as positively charged protons and negatively charged electrons. It is because of their mutual attraction that an atom comes to exist. Atoms can have a valence or charge that attracts them to other atoms of opposite charge to form molecules. Certain molecules combine in the same fashion to form extremely complex molecules that form the basis of living organisms. The most important one, called DNA, is itself composed of two complementary strands. Flowering plants have a stamen and a pistil that enables cross-fertilization.



Nearly all animals are either masculine or feminine. Of course, human beings are either men or women. See if you can think of other examples.

Human Being	Man	Woman
Animal	Male	Female
Plant	Stamen	Pistil
Mineral	Positive	Negative

Through the relationship between its two elements, each pair forms a higher level of existence. The highest expressions of life's possible relationships are those in human society. The human community contains many different kinds of social and spiritual connections culminating in the spheres of love in the family. The most profound, pure, and universal forms of relationship between people are those which involve love.

Some people believe that opposites repel each other and that progress comes about through conflict. But is this really true? Consider some examples from the realm of physics. A proton and an electron are attracted to each other, as are the opposite poles of a magnet. In the realm of biology, male and female are attracted to each other, too. Although in many ways the masculine and feminine realms are very different from each other, there is some mysterious force compelling men and women to seek one another.

What is the result of such unions? The result is the development of more complex levels of organization and the creation of new beings. Thus, a grain of pollen unites with a pistil, and a seed for a new plant is formed. The union of male and female animals results in offspring, be they little fish or lion cubs. And, of course, every human being is the result of the sexual union of man and woman.

Repulsion occurs when two subjects or two objects meet — for example, two north magnetic poles or two positively charged particles. Something similar happens in the animal world. Two stags may fight over which is to be the leader of the herd. Once this is settled, they stop fighting. The winner assumes a dominant position while the other is submissive. The same occurs in human relationships. People argue and fight because they have disagreements. Each wants to claim his authority in the subject position and prevail. However, if they persevere in their relationship for the sake of a common purpose, opposites eventually come to complement each other.

The way to progress

In every relationship, between subject and object there exists a creative tension based on mutual respect and cooperation. While conflict is sometimes necessary and inevitable, it is not productive unless it is resolved into cooperation. Violence doesn't produce love, and conflict doesn't lead to harmony unless there is first reconciliation. Antagonistic relationships in a family lead to family breakdown. Conflict between business partners can bring a company to ruin. These struggles should challenge us to transcend our differences and find the path to reconciliation.

What about the common struggles within human society? These struggles are often based on different opinions or ideologies. One person or group wants its view to dominate, and it may resort to violence to see that it is enforced. The root of this is insecurity, an inability to respect, appreciate, learn from and be enriched by something different from oneself.

The natural world is full of differences and variety. These differences, though, do not lead to conflict but to a beautiful picture of harmonious, mutually complementary relationships. The more varieties of plants one finds in a garden, the more beautiful the garden is. Beauty comes not from uniformity but from the harmony of variety.

For instance, if instead of an alphabet we had only the letter A, it would hardly lead to harmony since we wouldn't be able to communicate. On the other hand, the fact that Russian has 33 letters doesn't lead to conflicts. On the contrary, when we put those different letters together to form words in grammatical order, they enable us to understand each other.

People are different, but it is this diversity that makes human society creative and harmonious. Imagine what would happen to your class if all the students looked the same and had the same views about everything. What would such a class be like? There would be uniformity, but it wouldn't be true harmony.

How do relationships develop?

In order for relationships to develop, certain conditions are necessary.

First, there has to be a basis for interaction. It helps if people who wish to communicate with each other share a common language. They also should have something about which they both want to talk. The more they have in common, the deeper their conversation can be. At the same time, a certain degree of difference helps to stimulate give and take.

Besides having the potential to form a relationship, people must have a reason

for doing so. One can easily imagine two pupils passing each other in the school corridor day after day without speaking to each other. But if they find some common interest, this can become the starting point for a relationship. Common purpose makes the foundation for harmonious interaction. On the other hand, if two pupils approach each other with different or contradictory purposes, a confrontation may occur. Unless they can find some basis of mutual understanding, they may come to blows.



Further, for harmonious relationships to be established, there has to be a certain order. Human relationships take place in different contexts — family, work, school, etc. In each case, order needs to be clearly defined. For instance, in a classroom the teacher is the one who decides the purpose of the class and initiates the relationship with the class members. The pupils respond to the topic decided upon by the teacher. If either fails to keep their proper position, the class cannot function and confusion abounds.

When order and purpose are clearly established, there can be efficient give and take. This interaction, as it becomes deeper and smoother, leads to the harmony and unity of the different elements involved. For example, a soccer team, possessing eleven positions, will lose if all the players are chasing after the ball. In this case no one is keeping his position. In contrast, in a winning team each player is well disciplined and keeps his position, be it in goal, on the wing, at the back, midfield or striker. They pass to each other and play together harmoniously. With a spirit of cooperation passes go to the right place, players anticipate each other, and the team's performance seems like "magic." The players are not merely eleven individuals; they form an integrated unit.

Purpose of relationships

Everything holds a position in the hierarchy of being. Elementary particles exist not by themselves but as parts of a larger structure called an atom. Then, besides keeping their own integrity, atoms create relationships with each other, constructing molecules. In the natural world, every organism has a dual purpose: supporting its own existence and participating in a larger process. Each individual organism can exist only in connection with others, creating a more complex community, an *ecosystem*. In a pond, mineral elements are consumed by the plants and thus become part of living tissues. The plants serve as food for mollusks and fish and produce the oxygen they need for life. The fish feed on small algae but in turn become the prey of larger fish and birds.

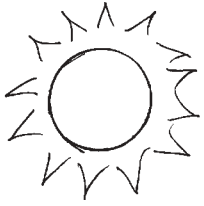
To repeat, every being has two complementary purposes — an individual purpose that secures its individual well-being and existence, and a whole purpose that maintains a contribution to the greater organization of which it is a vital part. In a healthy ecosystem a balance is maintained between these purposes.

The same principle can be applied to humans as well. If we revisit the soccer team analogy, we can say that an individual player trains and practices for two reasons. On the one hand, he enjoys playing and wants to become a better player; on the other hand, he wants the team as a whole to be successful.

Of these two purposes, one has priority over the other. There are some people who are brilliant soccer players but not good team members, because they focus on the pursuit of personal glory and satisfaction. If they have to choose between doing what they want to do and doing what the team wants them to do, they choose the former. The result of this is that the team suffers and their results get worse. When this happens, the "star" player cannot fulfill his own personal desires either. If, however, the star player puts the team before himself, the team will be successful and so will he. The greatest happiness comes when we can contribute to the happiness of others. When we do this, we feel that our lives have value and meaning beyond ourselves.

These dual purposes exist for all beings. They are not separate but are related and interdependent. Thus, a soccer player's individual purpose can only be accomplished through the fulfillment of the team's purpose.

It is difficult to balance these two purposes in our lives. The purpose for the whole should have priority, offering a moral context and guidance for the purpose for the

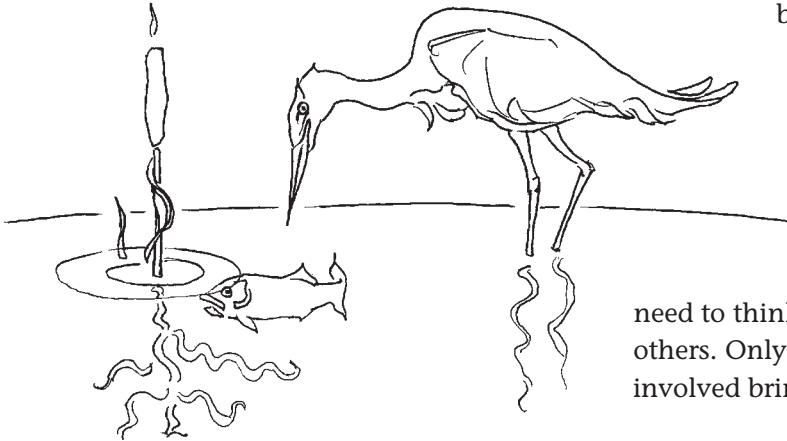


individual. If the purpose for the individual has priority, the higher level disintegrates. A family falls apart if each parent and child is concerned only about himself or herself. On the other hand, if the purpose for the whole is overemphasized, conformity and the suppression of individuality result, which is also wrong. When this happens, not only is the purpose for the individual frustrated, but also the purpose for the whole suffers. In order for harmony to be created, both purposes must be fulfilled cooperatively and simultaneously. The individual should live for the whole, and the whole should respect and nurture the well-being of

the individual. A good leader tries to keep all purposes in balance. He makes sure a job gets done but also tries to maintain a good morale on the team while taking into account the personal needs of each individual.

These are the basic principles that determine the existence of relationships. If we want to experience harmony in our world of relationships, we

need to think about our contribution to the welfare of others. Only then will the relationships in which we are involved bring us satisfaction and joy.



The Cossacks

by Leo Tolstoy

The day was absolutely clear, quiet, and hot. The morning freshness had dried up even in the forest, and myriad mosquitoes swarmed around the face, back and hands... Olenin looked at the dry greenery around him. It was cool and cozy; he thought of nothing, wished nothing. And suddenly he had such a strange feeling of an ungrounded happiness and love for everything that, out of his old childhood habit, he began to cross himself and thank someone. He suddenly understood with an unusual clarity, "Here I am, Dmitry Olenin, such a special being, lying God knows where, in some place where a deer lived, an old deer, a beautiful one, who could have never seen a man; in a place where no man had ever lain and thought. ... Flying between the leaves which look like great islands to them, mosquitoes are standing in the air and buzzing: 1, 2, 3, 1,000, a million, and all of them are something, and buzz for some reason, and each of them is as special a Dmitry Olenin as I am." He imagined clearly what the mosquitoes were thinking and buzzing about. "Here, here, boys! Here is someone to eat." They buzzed and swarmed around him. And he understood that in no way was he a Russian nobleman, a member of Moscow society, a friend and relation of these and those; he was just a mosquito, or a pheasant, or a deer, like those living around him. "Like them, like Uncle Yeroshka, I'll live, I'll die. And he is right: the grass will grow, that's all."



“What if the grass will grow?” he went on thinking, “Still I must live and be happy; for I want nothing but happiness. No matter what I am: a beast like them, on whom the grass will grow, and nothing more, or a frame, in which a part of the universal Deity is inserted — still I must live in the best way I can. But how must I live to be happy, and why wasn’t I happy before?” And he began to recollect his former life, and he felt repulsed at himself. He saw himself as a demanding egoist, while in reality he did not need anything for himself. And he looked and looked at the shimmering greenery, at the setting sun and the clear sky and felt as happy as before. “Why am I happy and for what did I live before?” he thought. “How demanding to myself I was, how I invented things and did myself nothing but harm and shame! And indeed I need nothing to be happy!” And he seemed to discover a new light. “Here is happiness,” he said to himself: “Happiness is to live for others. This is clear. The need of happiness is given to man; so it is justified. Satisfying it egoistically, that is, looking for wealth, glory, comfort, love for oneself, the circumstances may prevent it. It means these desires are unjustified, and not the need of happiness in itself. But what desires can always be justified, no matter what the circumstances are? Love, selflessness!” He became so glad and excited on discovering this truth which seemed new to him, that he sprang up on his feet to search impatiently for someone to love, to whom to do good, for whom to sacrifice himself. ...

CHAPTER 6

Human Nature

The human being is a mystery. It needs to be revealed, and if it takes your whole life to solve this riddle, don't say that you wasted your time. I deal with this mystery for I want to be human.

— Fyodor Dostoyevsky

What comprises human nature? Undoubtedly this is one of the most important questions in life. The meaning and purpose of human life, our actions and desires — everything depends on the way we understand human nature.

Let us start with defining the difference between humans and animals.

Why do people flock to zoos? What is so attractive about animals? Of course, this question has many answers, but if you have visited the zoo, you most likely have noticed that the biggest crowds gather around the cages with monkeys. Why? Because of all animals, the behavior of monkeys is the most similar to that of humans. Their antics and expressions cause us to smile. Of course, there are also differences between humans and monkeys. You may want to draw up a list of the similarities and differences. Here are a few differences to get you started:

Animal qualities	Human qualities
Has no sense of self	Capable of self-reflection
Has only a biological clock	Has a sense of time and history
Capable only of concrete thought	Capable of abstract reasoning
Speaks only one "language"	Capable of learning other languages
Inhabits only its own niche	Lives in almost any kind of environment
Has no moral sense	Has a moral sense
Behavior is guided by inborn instinct	Capable of learning skills, is creative
Is rarely monogamous	Is usually monogamous
Has no economy	Engages in trade
Has brief childhood, little sense of "family"	Has long childhood, strong sense of family
Does not bury the dead	Has feeling of respect toward the dead

One can always find exceptions to this list. For example, swans are known to be monogamous, and there are many people who do not study foreign languages. Taken all together, however, it is clear that human beings are not just another kind of

animal. One of the most striking differences is that people think and write books about such matters and sometimes conclude there is no real difference!

Mind and body

When we think about what we are, the first thing we can confidently say is that we have a body. We have four limbs, a head, a trunk, and all the organs that are inside. But is that all there is to us? No. We are also aware that we have a dimension that is not physical but, rather, spiritual. We have a soul that animates our body, giving our actions meaning and purpose. We have desires for beauty, truth, and goodness that do not originate in our physical body but in our soul. Sometimes people think that the mind is the same as the brain, but whereas the brain can be seen and operated on by surgery, the mind is invisible. The body may be sitting still,

relaxed and immobile, while the mind is darting from one object to another. While our body is always in the here and now, our mind can remember the past, imagine the future, and visit China, Africa, and the moon all within a few moments.

Yet are the soul and the body completely different? How do they interact so that they form a person and his personality? The best way to study a person's character is to observe his behavior, the way he expresses himself in gestures, in his manner of speech, in his presentation of himself. In this way we observe the visible, bodily expression of an invisible soul. Our body becomes the reflection, the visible expression of our spiritual side. But there is — and always will be — an element of mystery. We will never be able to understand completely the complexity of a human being.

The roots of a human being can be understood and rationalized only to some extent. The mystery of personality, its uniqueness, is not completely clear to anybody. Human personality is more mysterious than the world. It is the whole world. Man is a microcosm and encompasses everything within him.

— Nikolai Berdyaev
Russian philosopher

What is the human mind?

Let us reflect upon our inner nature a bit more, starting from the most simple things. Like animals, we all have instincts that provide for the physiological functions of our body, such as digestion, breathing, and a sense of balance. These processes are going on automatically and, unless something is wrong, there is no need to pay much attention to them. Wouldn't it be annoying if we had to remember to breathe? Or if, when riding a bicycle, we had to mathematically calculate the degree to which we should lean over when turning a corner? What if you had to consciously duck a brick flying through the air at your head? This instinctive aspect of our mind ensures that the physical body's needs — which are expressed through the desire to eat, to sleep, to be comfortable — are fulfilled. All this is concerned with self-preservation

and the support and development of life — not your life as a personality, but your existence as a separate biological entity.

People are more than just bundles of physical needs. We also have desires and aspirations of a spiritual nature. These spiritual desires are the basis of — and the creative force behind — human culture and civilization. Psychologists often distinguish between different faculties of the mind such as intellect, emotion, and will. Our intellect is active when we study or try to solve a mathematical problem. The intellectual function of the mind enables us to analyze information and judge its accuracy. We use our intellectual faculty to draw up





and evaluate plans. The intellect naturally seeks truth, and it is this pursuit of truth that has led to the development of science and philosophy.

The emotional aspect of our mind searches for beauty. So when we see a flower, we feel that it is beautiful and we feel joy. When we listen to an out-of-tune piano being played, we shudder. It is this emotional desire to create and appreciate beauty that is the wellspring of art and music.

And what about the will? The will naturally wants to do what is good. This is why we want to clearly know the difference between right and wrong. When we must make a decision, we want to make the right one, and when we are not sure what is right, our conscience feels terrible. In fact, this desire for goodness is so deep that it is very difficult to do something wrong. When we do something wrong, it is because we have convinced ourselves that it is really right, or at least not so bad. Criminals think up all kinds of justifications for their actions and reasons why their deeds are not actually wrong. Still, most people want to know what is right, and this is one of the impulses behind the development of religion. Religion discusses what is right and wrong and seeks to teach a moral way of life.

Our will acts as an energetic force that is influenced most profoundly by the interrelationship between our emotional feeling and intellectual understanding of a situation. Thus, if we have a clear idea, through our intellect, of how and why to achieve something and, concurrently, a strong emotional desire to reach the goal, our volition will have the power to persevere through difficulties to accomplish it. If, however, our emotional desire for the goal is weak or we don't know how to achieve it, the force of our volition will be compromised. That is why it is important that each of the faculties of the mind be developed in a balanced way. A person who is dominated by his intellect is likely to be too critical, perhaps incapable of forming close relationships. A person who is too emotional may be sentimental and mawkish, unable to make sensible decisions. When intellect and emotion are not properly developed, the force of volition can be misdirected as well, causing a person to be obstinate and obdurate.

The inner nature of human beings is influenced, on the one hand, by instincts which are directed toward supporting our biological life, and, on the other hand, by the deeper desires of the mind, which are mainly concerned with the fulfillment of our spiritual needs. The spiritual side of our life also consists of two parts. One aspect is concerned with the spiritual development of oneself, while the other is connected with living for the sake of others. What is the way to bring harmony between these two components?

To be sure, a life guided by noble values includes experiencing joy by fulfilling and satisfying one's own spiritual desires. However, the essence of a life of values is seeking to live harmoniously with others. In other words, a life of values is a *for-others* type of life.

What should be the relationship between our spiritual and bodily aspects, between personal development and living for the sake of others? Which element should be dominant in our lives, our physical desires or our spiritual desires?

Our physical desires are natural and good, but need to be controlled by the value-centered desires of the mind. For instance, the desire for self-preservation is not the highest value. A coward is someone who cannot control this desire and subordinate it to a higher purpose. When faced with danger, he runs away. Likewise, a glutton is someone who lives to eat instead of eating to live. He uses his mind to think how he can get food. He finds it difficult to share food with others and often eats his food in secret. A lazy person is someone who is dominated by the desire to sleep or rest. When the body dominates the mind, we put the fulfillment of physical desires first, even at the sacrifice of spiritual values. If self-centeredness becomes a habit, our mind and conscience become dull. It's clear that the mind's desire to realize values should control our physical desires; when this occurs, our physical desires can be fulfilled appropriately.

If we consider the two spiritual categories — personal development and living for the sake of others — we will see the same principle of relationship in operation between them. Personal maturity fulfills the individual purpose, while living for others fulfills the purpose of the whole. (You will remember that we spoke about these two categories in the chapter “The World of Relationships.”) It is very important to achieve maturity of character, to develop one's inner potential and unique talents, but such personal development will be truly directed toward goodness only if it is concerned with living for others.

When there is unity between mind and body, spiritual values permeate and elevate the physical life. Whole branches of culture have developed to fulfill physical desires in a meaningful way. For example, in many societies eating practices are highly ritualized. Food is carefully prepared and elegantly served. Eating a meal is a time for fellowship with family and friends. Architects design and build beautiful houses to live in. It is this infusion of values or spirituality in the physical functions that distinguishes human beings from animals. Sexual desire, too, becomes humanized by love and elevated into something sacred.

We can see that culture is an expression of the life of the mind. Even the economy has a spiritual aspect, since it is dependent upon entrepreneurs' creativity and the relationships between buyers and sellers. Thus, the quality of a society's culture and the level of its civilization naturally depend on the spiritual and mental health of its people.

Which aspect of human nature is most important?

But what is at the root of the soul? What is the deepest part of our nature, which harmonizes and integrates intellect, emotion, and will? Do you remember the exercise you did in which you made a list of the values you cherish most? You probably placed love toward the top of your list. Love of family, friends, and pets, among other things, are values that human beings tend to place above all else. Above power, wealth, intelligence, beauty, and all the rest, love seems to be what we desire most in life.

The 19th century Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev said that beauty, truth and goodness are all expressions of love.

Thus, love creates beauty, and we love something that is beautiful. Truth, too, is beautiful and elegant. And love put into practice creates goodness. Thus, love is the basis and source of value.

Our desire for love is the deepest and most fundamental spiritual desire of our mind. We all seek to love and be loved. This urge originates from a place deeper than will, deeper than intellect, and even deeper than emotion. In fact, our desire for love often contradicts rational explanation. The desire and

Goodness, truth and beauty are different images of unity. ... Every kind of unity on the basis of an internal connection is love. In this respect, goodness, truth and beauty are only different images of love.

— Vladimir Soloviev
Lectures on Godmanhood

capacity to give and receive love originate in the deepest part of the soul, the part of ourselves we call the heart. From the heart we have the impulse to seek joy through love. And it is through loving and being loved that we experience the greatest happiness.

Heart is deeper than emotion. We feel joyful if our heart's desire is fulfilled, and sad or angry when it is not. When we are intoxicated with love, life is full and complete. If a person does not grow up in an atmosphere of love, he may try to find joy through other means, such as power, money or fame. But nothing can give him complete happiness if he doesn't have love.

Heart is the core and essence of personality. Though intelligence is highly prized, and we often emphasize our capacity to think as what generally distinguishes hu-

mans from animals, we are much more than this. We are not just *Homo Sapiens*, or knowing man, we are also *Homo Amans* — loving man. That human beings are beings with heart means that we can live a life of love.

Perhaps you have heard the expression "He's got a good heart." Such a person is one who is kind and compassionate toward others. It is heart that is the motivating force toward harmony in everything we do. The quality of heart determines the direction or underlying purpose of our actions. For example, suppose you decide to study in the university. First you need to

think about what kind of entrance exams you would need to pass, to be able to prepare for them beforehand. Out of many colleges where you might study similar disciplines, you will most likely choose the one you like the most. And when making this choice, you will use not only your intellect, but also your emotions. Finally, you will need to use your will to overcome the many obstacles that can appear on the way to your goal. From even this simple example, it is clear that it is purpose that gives direction to our intellect, emotion and will. But none of them is the origin of purpose. It is heart that determines this.

The centrality of love

Poets and philosophers have described love for ages, and certainly we cannot begin to exhaust the mystery and magic of that topic. Here we will discuss it briefly in the context of moral values and our human nature.

What, then, is love? We cannot see love, but we can feel it. It is a magnet that attracts us. When asked how love looks, one person will describe it as being round

like the moon or broad like the ocean. A dramatic person might say love is like a wild desert. A romantic person might say it is like a beautiful, rocky mountain, while yet another might say it is powerful like Niagara Falls. All these would be correct answers, because they all describe different aspects of love. Love reveals itself to each person in a unique way. In one sense, love is harder than a diamond, but in another sense it is softer than down.

Love is precious because it gathers all things into harmony.

Heart is the impulse
to experience joy
through giving and
receiving love



Love is important not as one of our feelings, but because it transfers all of our life interests from concern for ourselves to concern for others, because it changes the whole center of our personal life.

— Vladimir Soloviev
The Meaning of Love

Love has the power to make the world into harmonious oneness. No other power can achieve this. Love is more than a magnetic power that attracts people's hearts. Love unites all five senses and focuses the whole person in one direction. When you really love a certain person, all your intentions and hopes, your soul itself, is concentrated on your beloved one. We feel the problems and worries of those we love as our own. In this sense, true love opposes egoism. We are not speaking only of romantic, conjugal love. This is the way a mother feels toward her child. This is the feeling that connects good friends.

When you think about love, what kind of love do you want? Do you want a love that is always changing, or unchanging? Do you want a love that is temporary, or one that is lasting? What love song would ever become popular if it portrayed love as temporary, conditional, changeable? Can you imagine the lyrics?

"I will love you as long as you cook my meals and wash my clothes ... "

In reality, when we are in love with someone, we feel that love will last forever. Why do lovers around the world make such promises to each other if true love is something impossible to achieve? We profess it, and believe it, because human beings are capable of true love. We all *want* love to be — and *expect* love to be — lasting, unchanging, and unconditional.

True love involves the giving of oneself for the benefit of the other. It includes the offering of our thoughts, our words and, especially, our actions. It is a commitment, a responsive act of will, a decision to care, a choice to be together in joy and sadness, in times of challenges and difficulties. Such love has four main qualities:

- ✗ True love is unselfish, often involving putting off our own immediate needs.
- ✗ True love is unchanging, not based on the whims of feelings, convenience, or other circumstances.
- ✗ True love is unconditional, meaning it does not demand anything in return, not payment, appreciation or any other reward.
- ✗ True love is unique, treating each person as an individual.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ... So faith, hope, and love abide, but the greatest of these is love.

— 1 Corinthians 13:4-13

In true love, we naturally feel those we love to be part of our deepest being. Then, our own sense of self-preservation will not allow our beloved to be hurt. This is what is meant by the teaching in the Christian tradition "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" Our ability to create a family of love and peace, a community of love and peace, and a world of love and peace depends on our ability to become individuals of love and peace.

Physical and spiritual development of the person

How are the spiritual and physical aspects of ourselves related to each other? What do we need for harmonious growth and development, not only of our body but also of our spirit?

For our body to grow to be strong and healthy, certain things are needed. Obviously we need air, light, warmth, water, a well-balanced diet, appropriate clothing, shelter, sufficient sleep and physical exercise, and an environment that is not badly polluted. Our health reflects the quality of the elements we take in. If any of these is lacking, our body soon starts to

complain. Our stomach quickly reminds us if we miss a meal, and our nose wrinkles up automatically if there is an unpleasant smell.

Our spiritual side grows in a similar way. It also needs certain elements for its growth and maturity. We need the love and security that come from being with our parents, family, and friends. We need to develop our understanding, wisdom, and insight into the purpose and meaning of life. We need to learn what is right and what is wrong. Initially, we learn these things from our parents; later, we learn them through studying religious literature, philosophy, and novels by such authors as Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Dickens. We need to have stimulating and meaningful experiences. We need to grow up in a moral atmosphere, rich in the elements of our culture, in which we can have the freedom and confidence to develop ourselves. However, if we read immoral books, pornographic magazines and trashy newspapers, if we watch movies that advocate violence and cruelty, then we are poisoning our spirit — similar to the way poisonous food destroys our physical health.

Finally, for our spirit to grow we have to not only receive love but give it by doing good deeds. When we use our physical body to good ends, our soul is nourished. That's why, when we do something good, we feel good. Our spirit becomes bright and beautiful. We have energy. You will notice that an old person who has led a life of being kind to others will have a bright and beautiful countenance despite all the wrinkles. Selfish behavior, on the other hand, corrupts the soul. A person who continuously uses his body to do evil deeds will develop an ugly and unattractive character. Thus, we may think of our body as the soil in which our spirit grows.

It may be difficult to understand and accept all of these explanations concerning our spiritual nature, but quite simply what it boils down to is this: *What we think determines what we do, and what we do shapes our character.* Therefore, the development

of our heart and character depends upon how much we practice what we believe. Although choosing a profession or career is important, our greatest concern in life should be to become a person who practices unselfish love.

The mere fact that we are born does not mean automatically that we are truly human. On the contrary, we may be lulled into believing that any action committed by a person is human. However, to be human is not a fact, but a task, and one may need a lifetime to fulfill it.



Something to
think about



"To be human is not a fact, but a task, and one may need a lifetime to fulfill it." What is this task, and how do we go about fulfilling it?

For Your
Journal



Puzzle of myself

Close your eyes and say to yourself: *I contain within myself many qualities or aspects. Where are they?* Meditate upon your human characteristics and personality traits.

Create a graphic design in which you depict the different aspects of yourself, such as: feelings, intellect, will, humor, faith, hope, mind, body, creativity, conscience, depression, anger, affection, energy, etc. Find the labels that best describe your own unique qualities. You may want to write these labels into the design.

Look at the finished design and write down your impressions and reactions. This is an opportunity to discover the many facets of your personality and how each element relates to the others. Which aspects are more dominant? Which parts need more integration in order for you to experience a sense of unity within?

Night

by Ivan Bunin

In the book *Night*, Russian author Ivan Bunin describes the depth of the night sky, “full of many-colored hanging stars.” He can feel the silence tugging at his thoughts and almost hear the “crystal tinkling present in that silent world like some clanging dream.” Bunin is drawn into the mystery of the night sky and begins the universal inner dialogue:

What am I thinking about? When I asked myself this question, I wanted to remember what I was thinking about, and immediately I thought of my thinking, that this thinking was the most surprising, the most amazing and the most fatal thing in my life. What was I thinking about, what was there in me? Some thoughts (or something like thoughts) about the surroundings, and a wish to remember these surroundings, to keep them in me. ... What else? A feeling of great happiness caused by this great silence, great harmony of night. ...

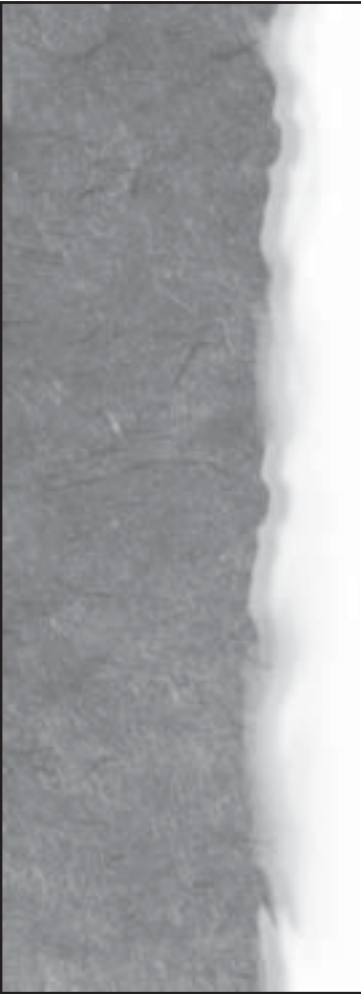
What was I thinking about? That I understood nothing both in myself and in the world, and at the same time understood I didn’t understand, understood my being lost in that night, in that magic sound, either living, dead, senseless of telling me something most important.

That thought about my own thought, that understanding of my own lack of understanding, is the most irresistible proof of my being part of something many times greater than myself. This is the proof of my immortality. Besides everything that is mine, there is something else in me, something essential and indivisible — really, it is a particle of God. ...

Only man is surprised at his own existence and thinks of it. This is his main difference from other beings who are still in Paradise, in the state of unthinking about themselves. Do they think, these myriad of the night field, these cicadas which fill the whole world with their love song? They are in Paradise, in a blessed dream of life. I have already woken up. I am awake. The world is in them, and they are in it, and I am apart and looking at it.

I am listening and thinking, and that is why I am infinitely lonely in this midnight silence, magically tinkling with myriad of crystal brooks, unendingly, with a great obedience and thoughtlessness pouring into some fathomless bosom. The bright light of Jupiter eerily illuminates the tremendous space between sky and sea, the great





temple of the night, above which it hangs as a sign of the Holy Spirit. I am alone in this temple. I am awake. ...

It has become still more majestic and terrible, the endless temple of the star-laden sky. Many large morning stars have already emerged in it. The misty golden pillar of light is falling vertically into the milky mirror of the lethargic sea. The small trees seem even more immobile, and even smaller in this scarce southern garden. And the continuous unending tinkling, filling the silence of sky, ground and sea has become more like some beautiful crystal flowers. ... What will this tinkling silence reach at last?

Here it is, the sigh of life, the rustle of a wave on the shore, and then again some light movement of air, of sea freshness and of flower scent. And I wake up: I look round and get up. I run down from the balcony, go along the garden and run down to the water. I go along the sand, sit down at the edge of the water and blissfully immerse my hands in it. They immediately begin to sparkle with myriad of shining drops, of countless lives. ...



To read

Chapter 1 “The Law of Human Nature” in *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis

CHAPTER 7

Life After Life

Life after death ...

Many of you may find it strange to even begin a discussion on such a topic. It is not very often that we think about death. For many of us, it is much more natural just to live, without considering what will occur in that last moment. Or, maybe, we are sure that life is only that which is taking place in the here and now, and that death means the end of our existence.

Of course, today it would be rather strange to believe in the next world in the same way people did several millennia or centuries ago. For example, the picture of hell, where poor sinners were thought to roast in eternal flames, or the vision of paradise, where righteous people expected to spend their time enjoying heavenly music surrounded by beautiful angels in snow-white garments, hardly seems realistic to anyone today. However, that does not mean that the very idea of a person's life continuing after the death of his physical body is absurd.

In any case, from time immemorial, the representatives of quite different religious and philosophical trends have believed in the immortality of the human spirit. We are mistaken if we think that such a belief is outdated. Now more than ever, new scientific data can help us see in a new light and better understand the questions that humanity has asked for many centuries, such as the question of death and immortality. What is man? Life? Love? Death? Each of us has his own answer to these questions, even without meditating on them consciously.

Let us consider one of them. What is death? From the point of view of a doctor or a biologist, death is the stopping of the organism's vital activities, the cessation of the heart and brain functions. One moment, a person is alive — with all his complicated inner life, his feelings and recollections — and suddenly, due to the failure of his body, he has ceased to exist in this world. Does this really mean that everything composing our life, everything determining our personality, depends only on the functioning of our heart and brain? In other words, does the “self” simply disappear when our heart stops beating? Or does something remain; something which religious people call the soul?

What determines the inner self?

Your personality is determined not by the color of your eyes, your height, or your facial features, but by your ideas, your internal world, the world of spiritual “substance.” All of us belong not only to the visible, but also to the invisible world. It is not necessary to be a religious person in order to become confident of this statement. For instance, what are you thinking about now, while reading these lines? What are you feeling? If you are interested in this discussion, your thoughts are probably



concentrated on this text. But maybe you are sitting at home, having settled yourself cozily on a sofa, with the textbook and a cup of tea. Despite your best intentions to prepare well for the next lesson, it suddenly becomes very difficult for you to concentrate on the text you are trying to read. Your thoughts are taking you away, through the events of your last holidays or back to your classmate's birthday party which you attended last Sunday.

Your body has remained in the same position, on the sofa, and any detached on-looker would say that you are studiously preparing for your lesson. But your thoughts and feelings at this moment are very far from your body. Unlike your body — limited by time and space — your thoughts dwell in a dimension not subject to these limitations. And it is undeniable that invisible, immaterial things are the very essence of our human nature. Not only thoughts and feelings, but also the effort to understand the surrounding world; the capacity for unselfish, self-sacrificing love; the determination to understand oneself, to find one's place in the world, the constant search, the dissatisfaction with oneself — all of these make us human and different from animals.

Where did we acquire these capabilities? Where does the soul come from? What is its relationship with the body? Can brain cells generate the human soul, in the same way that the liver produces bile? There is a very significant difference here. The liver is just one of the human body's organs, whose purpose is to produce substances necessary for the organism's vital activities. But the feeling of love toward one's family, the ability to think logically, and the other elements of personality are not substances; we can't see them, even if we carefully observe all the processes occurring within the brain cells. How can neurons produce something immaterial? We have no evidence that such things happen.

To say that the body is dead and hence the soul does not exist anymore is like saying that radio waves do not exist because your radio no longer works. At the moment of death the connection between soul and body is cut, but how can you prove that the soul itself ceases to exist?

Is it possible to look beyond the boundary of death?

Of course, it is also difficult to imagine strictly scientific proofs of the opposite assertion that a human personality goes on living after the body's death. Yet, although it seems quite fantastic, there are data suggesting that death is only the passage from one life to another life. You may have heard about the books by an American medical doctor, Raymond Moody. His book *Life After Life* reports of people who have lived through a clinical death (that is, those who have stepped over the border between life and death, and then were brought back to life).

His writings seem to have "opened the gate" to numerous investigations by other scientists dealing with the same phenomena. Having questioned many people who had undergone a clinical death, Dr. Moody concluded that today we cannot disavow people's stories of returning from "the other side." Thanks to the efforts of these

researchers, we have records of the experiences of people who have “died.” This evidence can help us understand death in quite a new way and to reconsider whether there is nothing beyond this boundary. Another scientist, Dr. Elizabeth Fiore, writes about this subject in her book *The Unquiet Dead*:

Have you ever chanced to think about what will happen to you after death? My studies in the hospital allow me to assume that life goes on after biological death. Recollections, thoughts, feelings, perception do not disrupt. ...

This material is based on talks with hundreds of people who have undergone death and then have been brought back to life. After the publishing in 1975 of Dr. Moody's book *Life After Life*, this scientific field began to develop rapidly, and the results of different scientists' work surprisingly correspond to each other. ...

The evidence of people who have undergone a clinical death are amazingly alike, up to separate details. ...

Death appears to be a smooth, natural passing to the spiritual reality, and is not accompanied by the loss of consciousness. My patients spoke about the immediate feeling of liberation from pain and all kinds of fears which they had experienced a minute before abandoning their bodies. They felt as if they were rising high and soaring, observing at the same time everything that was occurring with their prostrate bodies below. Often they tried at that time to convince their relatives that nothing terrible was happening to them, that they were alive. With a surprising feeling of freedom they went on rising, rising to the source of a bright, white light. The moment of joining that light brought a feeling of infinite love, peace of mind and harmony. ...

Those who “died” noticed that they possessed a perfect body, devoid of any of the infirmities they had when alive. For example, if death had been caused by a car accident in which the physical body was disfigured, the new spiritual body would be undamaged and intact. If people had been blind, after their death they could see perfectly. In such cases, after being revived, they surprised their families and doctors by quite detailed descriptions of what had been happening to them and around them while they were supposedly “dead.”

One case described by Dr. Moody is especially surprising in this respect. A blind man had undergone clinical death. When revived, he still could not see. But to the surprise of his family and doctors, he managed to give a precise account of everything that had happened while the doctors tried to revive him. Furthermore, he even described the surgery in detail, the color of the walls, the curtains on the windows, the appearances of the doctors operating on him — and all this while his body lay prostrate with no signs of life.

One can find many such examples in the books by Drs. Moody, Fiore, Kubler-Ross and other scientists. In his book *The Mystery of Life and Death*, Russian priest Alexander Men also spoke about this:

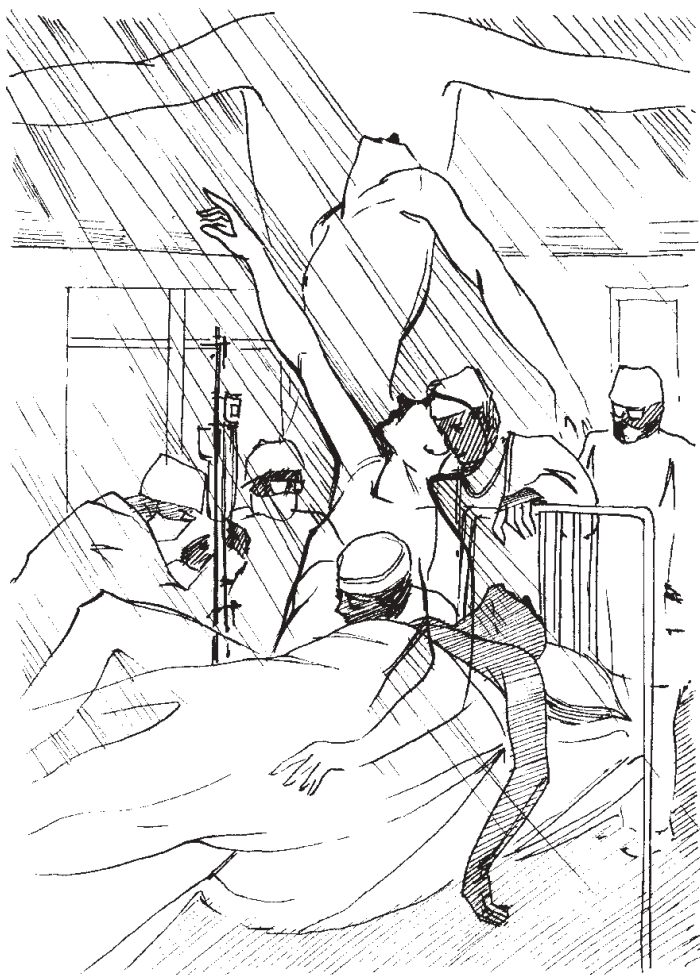
Many years ago, before the book *Life After Life* was published, I had come across such phenomena. I wrote down the accounts of people who had died on the operating table but then returned to life, thanks to the doctor's efforts. ... I must say that these accounts were similar to each

other, and when Raymond Moody's book appeared, I was not surprised at all, because everything proved to be rather familiar to me. And on the whole, there was nothing unexpected about it for Christians, because we had always professed this creed.

All of these anecdotal investigations cannot be considered scientific proofs of life after death, but they testify to the fact that there are phenomena that require a new explanation. This is the proper scientific approach — not trying to adjust new facts to already existing theories, but, on the contrary, putting forward and then testing new hypotheses that could explain such seemingly fantastic phenomena. Who knows — perhaps we are standing on the threshold of a discovery that will change significantly our ideas about human beings. Perhaps soon the issues discussed in the present chapter will become not a question of belief but a subject of scientific inquiry.

Opening the curtain to the unknown

It is not mere chance that at present, in various books and in the mass media, so much attention is being paid to issues that puzzle modern science. Many prefer to either ignore or to dismiss these ideas and experiences as quackery. We have heard about parapsychology, biological fields, spiritual healers, and extra-sensory perception. No doubt there may be charlatans involved in these areas who take advantage of such general interest. But it is unreasonable, because of this alone, to completely dismiss any phenomena that are not within the limits of classical scientific theories. The controversy itself shows that we are witnessing a new science being born, one that will discover new laws for us — the laws of spiritual reality. That is why it is important to separate fact from fiction, not to ignore or try to discount these unusual phenomena, but to seek to explain them.



Knowledge of these “non-material” experiences may affirm the notion that man is not only a material being but has a spiritual dimension as well. Perhaps besides a physical body endowed with instinct and five senses (touch, smell, vision, hearing and taste), man also possesses a spiritual body with five spiritual senses that correspond to the senses of the physical body. Perhaps also, man's soul and all that is considered as “self” or personality exists after the death of the physical body. This spiritual dimension may indeed correspond to a spiritual world, with which we will become acquainted once we cross the threshold of death. It may be that this spiritual world is no less real, multicolored, and multifaceted than the one in which we are living now.

Given such a hypothesis, the explanation of all the phenomena mentioned above is quite logical. For instance, from this point of view, extrasensory and extraordinary abilities would be nothing but a manifestation of spiritual capacities that are dormant in most people. Certainly the testimony of those who have undergone clinical death points to the existence of a spiritual world that awaits all of us in the future.

Why should we consider the afterlife?

A question may be stirring in many of you: Why should we discuss life after death at all? One thing is obvious to each of us: Sooner or later we all will die, and then we will know for certain whether there is something beyond this physical existence. But, you may be thinking, what's the use of trying to understand this something *now*? What does it have to do with our present life here on earth? There is another question closely connected with the previous one. If it is true that our life on earth is only a short moment in comparison with eternity in a spiritual world, then what is the meaning of this earthly life?

Belief in the immortality of the human soul can support our search for life's deeper meaning, although this is not to say that meaning in life can be found only under this belief. It would be wrong to assert that people who do not believe in the soul's immortality are less developed or less moral. But, for a man of weak moral will and principles, the conviction that there is no judgment or life after death provides

another reason to justify an egotistical lifestyle. If life is only 70 to 80 years of existence after which there is nothing, we may come to feel that "all is permitted," and that the main aim of life should be the search for pleasure and the satisfaction of our desires by any means. In the words of Ivan Karamazov, "There is no virtue if there is no immortality." Why should one strive for anything if at the end all of one's efforts will be crowned by the same experience that everyone else has — death?



Of course, this is a complicated problem, and it would be wrong to assert that those who do not believe in the soul's immortality are hopeless ego-centrists. But for a person not possessing a strong will and moral principles, such a notion contains tremendous danger, because it gives a logically-grounded possibility of justifying any kind of action. It is not by chance that one of Russia's greatest writers, Dostoyevsky, paid so much attention to this issue.

In contrast, when a person understands that his existence does not end with the death of his body, he comes to take an entirely different view of his earthly life. The fear of death disappears. He begins to realize that his life is unique, that it is given to him only once, and that his fate in the next world depends on how he lives his life in this world. Understanding this, such a person is much more likely to use his life to develop his capacity for sacrificial, active, unselfish love; a love not only for friends and relatives, but for everyone.

Let us turn to the words of Alexander Men once more:

It is the very Eternity that enriches the life on this side of the borderline. Because then we are not allowed to say that death's abyss will swallow everything. ... For us, it is sufficient to know this kernel of practical truth: What is sown in this life will grow into Eternity, have an echo in Eternity. And it is so clear, so logical. ...

Those people who were brought back to life after they had experienced the state of clinical death gained the same kind of understanding. Here is an excerpt from the book *Life After Life*, beginning with one survivor's testimony:

Since then, it has been on my mind constantly what I have done with my life, and what I will do with my life. My past life — I'm satisfied with it. ... I really did everything I wanted ... and I'm still alive and I can do some more. But since I died, all of a sudden, right after my experience, I started wondering whether I had been doing the things I had done because they were good, or because they were good for me. Before, I just reacted off the impulse, and now I run things through my mind first, nice and slow. Everything seems to have to go through my mind and be digested, first.

I try to do things that have more meaning, and that makes my mind and soul feel better. And I try not to be biased, and not to judge people. I want to do things because they are good, not because they are good to me. And it seems that the understanding I have of things now is so much better. I feel like this is because of what happened to me, because of the places I went and the things I saw in this experience.

There is a remarkable agreement in the "lessons," as it were, which have been brought back from these close encounters with death. Almost everyone stresses the importance of trying to cultivate love for others in this life, a love of a unique and profound kind. One man who met a being of light felt totally loved and accepted, even while his whole life was displayed in a panorama for the being to see. He felt that the "question" the being was asking him was whether he was able to love others in the same way he was being loved. He now feels that it is his commission while on earth to learn how to do so.

Perhaps an understanding of the infinite scope of our lives can lead us to an understanding of more profound moral principles and to the existence of a spiritual force that is always available to us.

Stages of human life

Let us now discuss one final issue related to this topic. Consider the real possibility that our earthly life is a time of preparation for our life after death. It means that our spiritual development transcends the boundary of death.

Think about how your existence began. First, you spent the first nine months of your existence in your mother's womb. During this time, all your organs were formed, even though most of them were quite useless during this stage of life. Why should you have, for instance, lungs or eyes? You were surrounded by liquid and darkness. The purpose of your development during those nine months was simply to prepare you for the next stage of your life.

At last, the moment of your birth arrived. If you had been conscious, isn't it possible that you would have perceived your birth as death? A baby must experience something close to agony as it is separated from its mother and enters the outside world.

At that point the second stage of your life began. You were now in quite a new environment with new laws and new priorities. Your physical abilities developed rapidly. At the same time your spiritual side, your ability to love, began to grow. Just

as the development of your physical organs seemed unnecessary during your life in the womb, you may think that your spiritual growth is unimportant for your physical life. After all, it often seems that a complete egocentric is able to live quite a happy life.

But what if your years on earth are actually preparation for another stage of your life? What if things that seem unnecessary here suddenly become indispensable there? Aren't these questions worth thinking about?

Perhaps now it is not the most important thing to imagine the nature of our life beyond death. For now, it is much more important to remember the meaning of our life here on earth with all of its infinite possibilities.

*What we have sown
in this life will grow
into Eternity.*



Rose of Jericho

by Ivan Bunin

As a sign of the faith in eternal life, in resurrection from the dead, in the ancient East they put a rose of Jericho in coffins and graves.

It is strange to call a rose, moreover, a rose of Jericho, this tangle of dry prickly stalks looking like our tumbleweed, this hard grass of desert which can be found only in the stony sands near the Dead Sea, at the lifeless edge of the Sinai Mountains. But, according to the legend, it was called so by Holy Savva who chose to dwell in the terrible Fire valley, a bare and dead hollow in the Judean desert. He decorated the symbol of resurrection given to him as a wild prickle with the most beautiful earthly simile he knew.

For this prickle is indeed miraculous. Picked and carried away by a wanderer, it can lie dry, gray and dead for years. But if put into water, it begins to give small leaves and rosy flowers. And the poor human heart rejoices: There is no death in the world, no end to the past! No partings and losses, until my soul, my love, my memory is alive!

I comfort myself like this, too, and resurrect in myself those bright ancient countries where I also walked some time, those blessed days when the sun of my life showed midday, when, in the prime of my force and hopes, together with her, who, by God's will, has become my life-long companion, I was making my first long journey, my marriage trip which was at the same time a pilgrimage to the Holy land of our Lord, Jesus Christ. In the great silence and forgetfulness it lay before us — the valleys of Galilee, the hills of Judea. ... It was spring, and the same anemones and poppies were blooming before us as in the time of Rachel, the same lilies were flowering and the same birds singing as in the Gospel parable. ...

A rose of Jericho. In the living water of my heart, in the clear liquid of love, sadness and tenderness, I immerse the roots and stalks of my past — and my magic plant is alive again. Move away, my inevitable hour when this liquid runs short, when my heart becomes scarce and dry, and the dust of forgetfulness covers my rose of Jericho forever.



CHAPTER 8

Searching for Meaning

Imagine that you could connect your brain to a machine that would give you every experience you could possibly desire. Would you want to do that? Would you be happy after the initial pleasure and enjoyment? Probably not. It is part of our nature to want to act and accomplish something and not merely to have pleasurable experiences. We also want to *be* someone, a person of greatness and noble deeds. Neither of these is possible, if we are attached to an “experience machine.” The desire to be someone and do something, to lead a meaningful life, is why a person is ready to go through suffering and difficulties. This is not to say that it is necessary to suffer to find meaning but that sometimes suffering is unavoidable, and that life remains meaningful in spite of suffering.

In a survey, nearly 8,000 students were asked what they considered “very important.” Sixteen percent chose “making a lot of money,” whereas 78 percent said their first goal was “finding a purpose and meaning to my life.”

Yet sometimes people feel that life has no meaning. Life seems empty and they cannot see any point to it. It is just a boring routine — getting up, eating breakfast, going to work, eating lunch, working, coming home, eating dinner, watching television, going to bed — Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and maybe even Sunday. They feel like the Greek character Sisyphus who was condemned to each day push a rock to the top of a hill, only to see it roll down again each night. What is the point of it all? Why earn money when one doesn’t have the time to enjoy it? Sometimes people work for the sake of their children. But why have children? Why bring children into a meaningless world where everything is absurd?

There is something tragic about a person who has lived a busy life and after retirement begins to feel that he has wasted his life, that it has no meaning or value. There is a saying, “Live as if you were living for the second time and had acted as wrongly the first time as you are about to act now.” If we were to reflect in this way upon the decisions we make and the actions we take, we might do both differently.

People who cannot find meaning in life may try to fill the emptiness by seeking money or power. Alternatively, since it is so painful to admit to oneself that one’s life has no meaning, they may try to keep themselves busy, filling up every moment of the day with work, with reading, with music, with conversation, with anything that will keep their minds occupied and stop them from having to listen to themselves. Inside there remains a void that needs to be filled.

The meaning of life

Different people see life differently, and each of us has to find his own pathway to meaning. The meaning of life should not be something abstract, but should help us to live our own unique life to the fullest. Here is a selection of different views of the meaning of life.

Life is a path toward victory: *“Veni, vidi, vici — I came, I saw, I conquered.”*

— Julius Caesar, Roman emperor

Life is a mission: *“The search for meaning is the search for a goal, a cause, a common task.”*

— N.F. Fedorov, 19th century Russian religious philosopher

Life is a drama: *“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.”*

— William Shakespeare, 16th century English playwright

Life is a journey toward God: *“Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart is not quiet until it finds rest in Thee.”*

— Augustine, early Christian saint

Life is doing good: *“If there is any meaning and purpose in life, then this meaning and purpose are not in our own happiness, but in something much greater. You need to do goodness!”*

— Anton Chekhov, 19th century Russian writer

Life is love: *“We live in this world only if we love.”*

— Rabindranath Tagore, Indian poet of late 19th—early 20th century

Life is happiness: *“Life is a gift, life is happiness, every minute could be a century of happiness.”*

— Fyodor Dostoyevsky, 19th century Russian writer

Life is a maze: *“Life is an uneven, irregular and complicated movement.”*

— Michel Montaigne, 16th century French philosopher

Life is always new: *“Human life should always be like this river that is in front of me: all the time one and the same bed, but every moment there is fresh water in it.”*

— Henry David Thoreau, 19th century American thinker

Life is constant change: *“You knew ecstasy — you need to learn suffering. I live until I keep changing. Only a monument can stay still, not a living being.”*

— Igor Severyanin, early 20th century Russian poet

Life is labor: *“Labor is the first basic condition of human life, to such an extent that we even need to say: Labor created the human being himself.”*

— Friedrich Engels, 19th century German philosopher

Life is work: *“Work is liberating us from three great evils: boredom, vice, and poverty.”*

— Voltaire, 18th century French philosopher

Life is duty: *“The greatest pleasure in life is knowing that you have fulfilled your duty.”*

— William Hazlitt, early 20th century English publicist

Life is suffering: *“I was born in tears, lived in tears and am dying in tears.”*

— A. P. Sumarokov, 18th century Russian poet and dramatist

Life is a path to death: *“All men are brothers, and the same end awaits them all — death.”*

— Albert Camus, 20th century French existentialist

Life is creativity: *“There is hardly any bigger joy than the joy of creating.”*

— Nikolai Gogol, 19th century Russian writer



Which statements do you agree with? Are there statements that you don't like? Try to give your own definition of the meaning of life. What does your answer say about you and how you see yourself? What are your ultimate goals? Expectations? Hopes? Fears?

Why search for meaning?

We've already discussed the difference between animals and human beings in the chapter called "Human Nature." As humans we are conscious of ourselves, and so we strive to understand the meaning of our own lives and what is happening around us.

Viktor Frankl, a psychologist who spent several years in a Nazi concentration camp, recognized the importance of living a meaningful life. He was struck by the fact that those inmates for whom there was no meaning in life soon became depressed at their situation, lost hope and died. The only people who survived were those for whom life was meaningful, even life in the camp. In the concentration camp finding meaning in life became an issue of life and death. In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl writes:

Whether the inmate had the courage to live or became sick and tired of life always depended just upon whether the person could see meaning in his personal life. In the desperate situation of the concentration camp, meaning had to be deep enough to embrace not only life but suffering and even death.

But let us return to normal life. Why is it impossible to live just for sake of living without thinking of the meaning of events?

First, one needs to recognize that every person attaches some meaning to his life. It is just that sometimes we are unaware of it.

Imagine a man who has never thought about his life's meaning. Nevertheless, the only reason for any of his actions is that he considers it meaningful, whether it is as simple as having morning tea or taking the bus to the office, or making some serious decisions. His actions correspond to his own unconscious concept of life. If we bring to light the deepest meaning in everything that we choose to pursue, we can gain self-confidence and peace of mind.

Well, then, what is the problem? Why do we have to think of "eternal questions"?

First of all, sooner or later everybody wonders, "What am I living for?" And if we start to think about these questions while we are young, we will be prepared in the future to find the deeper dimension of meaning in our life's path. Our answers and belief can provide strength to help us withstand the blows of fate, to overcome our challenges and difficulties with dignity.

Suppose you live according to the laws of goodness and try to love only because you were taught this way, but not because you had decided that this was the right way. A time of trial comes in your life: Your friend has betrayed you, or you have become seriously ill. Then you face questions you have never thought about before. Why has this happened to you? What is the meaning of it? Finding no answer, you may be ready to deny your previous beliefs (which really have never been yours) and change your philosophy of life. You think, "If life is cruel to me, I also have the right to be cruel."

It sometimes happens that a person declares that life has no meaning or purpose. In some cases perhaps, this is due to some action that violated his innate sense of right and wrong. As a result of his own weakness he is sometimes plunged into the

depths of despair. For example, Macbeth, not long after murdering his king, declared:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle.
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

— William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

Empty words?

Maybe discussions about the meaning of life seem a waste of time. Often lofty words hide shallowness or a lack of will to solve real problems.

Certainly, if you spend your whole life lying on the sofa, discussing the general problems of the universe, nothing will come out of it. But it's important to understand the following: In order to find meaning in any concrete situation, we have to view it in its larger, even global context.

Imagine the following scenario: Your goal of entrance to a competitive university was blocked because of your low scores on the entrance exams. How would you react? If you look at it only from the point of view of your immediate purpose — studying at this university — then your failure is very depressing and of no benefit at all. At best you will waste a year waiting to retake the exams. But if you adopt a broader perspective, perhaps you will find new meaning in it: Thanks to your failure you have started working more diligently, and new opportunities are opening up. You have gained some experience and learned more about yourself and your abilities. You are now able to reconsider whether or not your choice of university or field of study is best for you. Maybe you will find new friends or some unexpected opportunities for your professional growth. However, all this can happen only when you consider that your exam failure might not have been a tragedy, and that your new work is an opportunity, not just a duty to be fulfilled until you can become a student.

Even this simple example shows that the way we look at this or that situation depends upon our general attitude about life and its purpose. It's not we but life itself that raises the question of meaning. However, a human being has to answer it daily — and not by his words but by his actions.

Everyone's path is unique

Sometimes we are tempted to rely completely on someone else's advice, to surrender to someone the responsibility for our life. It can be one of our friends, our parents, or even an idea from a book. Yet it is wise to listen to the advice of a person who has more experience and more wisdom. Why not?

It's good to listen to advice, and another person often can help us to take a



broader perspective on our own situation. But we shouldn't forget that nobody can give us the unique meaning that we ourselves can find in life.

Every human being is unique, and our life path is unique as well. We can learn a lot from others, but it makes no sense to try to blindly imitate the way of another person.

In the same way, we ourselves do not have the right to force the answers we've found on anybody. What proved to be right and vitally important for us can be harmful for others — simply because it will stop them from their own search. We have no right to reject anybody in need of our help, and we may be able to help him or her see what has gone unnoticed, but we shouldn't try to live their lives for them. Everyone must pass through his own path in search of truth.

Is there meaning in suffering?



Everyone has suffered in life. Is it possible to find meaning in suffering?

First of all, it's important to understand that it's not suffering itself that is so crucial, but our attitudes toward it. In identical difficult situations, one person may become more wholesome, compassionate and deep, while another may be completely smashed by the burden. It is our attitude to life and what we believe in that will decide how we cope with difficulties.

Religious people find that faith in God gives their life meaning and purpose and helps them find courage and strength to bear suffering and

disaster. One Anglican priest dying of cancer reflected upon the value of suffering as he had experienced it in his own life:

Suffering can often produce great depths of character, mature understanding, warm compassion and rich spirituality. Of course, we should always strive to heal the sick and relieve the oppressed; and we should rejoice that in heaven we shall finally be set free from all pains and tears. But a diamond is caused by a lump of coal being subjected to extreme pressure and heat over a long period of time. Again, a beautiful pearl emerges when an oyster has to cover an irritating object with layer upon layer of smooth mother-of-pearl lining excreted from its own body.

It is sometimes only through suffering that we begin to listen to God. Our natural pride and self-confidence have been stripped painfully away, and we become aware, perhaps for the first time, of our own personal needs. We may even begin to ask God for help instead of protesting about our condition or insisting on explanations.

I still do not know why God allowed my cancer, nor does it bother me. But I am beginning to hear what God is saying, and this has been enormously helpful to me.

I am content to trust myself to a loving God whose control is ultimate and whose wisdom transcends my own feeble understanding.

— David Watson

Sometimes we put all our trust in one person and then he betrays us. Or we grow old and our beauty fades. Perhaps a family member dies at an early age, or we are wrongly accused and punished. Or we invest our life in making money but then lose it. In each of these situations we will suffer, feeling incredible pain if we see in the situation the only meaning of our lives. That is why many people search for a meaning in life that transcends the impermanence of everyday existence. And this search may bring them to a belief in God.

No easy way

What do you think is waiting for a person who decides to think over his destiny, to find the meaning of his life? One thing can be guaranteed: It will be difficult. We need to not only search for meaning, but also fight for it, and this fight is not an easy

*When we suppress our internal angel,
he turns into a devil.*

— Viktor Frankl

one. Why is it so? In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote on the law of human nature, explaining about the most essential human contradiction, namely, that all of us want to live according to the internal law of love and goodness that gives meaning to our lives, but no one lives that way all the time. We exist in constant internal struggle. And if a person loses in this inner

fight between good and evil, then deceit, betrayal and even murder can seem meaningful to him.

But then is there any hope that we can overcome this contradiction? What can help us on this way? It is conscience that is our internal guide, our most reliable support. If we listen to its voice, then our search for meaning will never lead us into cruelty or the humiliation of others.

And what is happiness? Fulfilled pride...

There is incredible joy in possessing a young soul that has just started to blossom! It is like a flower, whose fragrance is the best when received by the first sunbeam; it has to be picked up at this moment, and after you breathe in its fragrance, you can throw it away on the road — perhaps somebody will pick it up! I feel within myself this hunger that takes in everything it meets on its way; I look at the sufferings and joys of others only in their relation toward me, as the food that supports my strength. I cannot be influenced by any passion any longer myself, my pride is suppressed by circumstances, but it expresses itself in a different form, for pride is nothing but desire for power, and my first pleasure is to subdue everything around me to my will; to induce in others love, loyalty and fear of me. Isn't it the first sign and greatest celebration of power? To be the source of sufferings and joy for somebody — isn't it the sweetest food for our pride? And what is happiness? Fulfilled pride ...

— Mikhail Lermontov
A Hero of Our Time

This passage encompasses the life philosophy of Pechorin, Lermontov's hero. What do you think about it? Do you agree with this kind of understanding of the meaning of life, or is there something about it you don't like? Would you like to be like Pechorin?

If after a long and difficult search you find meaning — the meaning of life for you — then it's important not to stop here but to fulfill it in your life. For example, if becoming a scientist will give your life meaning, then you need to take some concrete steps that will lead you to reach your goal — enter university, do scientific research, read scientific journals, and so on.

In this way you will gain more experience, and most likely you will be led to a broader understanding and see new horizons. That is why it is important, after having found some meaning, not to close yourself off to new understandings that might affect the balance you have found, but instead to be open to further searching.

Often those who face many obstacles and overcome many difficulties in life find the greatest satisfaction in their personal lives and the greatest understanding of the life we all share.

You can compare the life credo of Pechorin that was quoted above with the understanding of 20th century sociologist Pitirim Sorokin, who was born in Russia but at the age of 23 had to emigrate to the West:

Whatever happens in the future, now I know three things that I will keep in my head and heart forever. Life, even the most difficult one, is the best treasure in the world. Following one's

duty is the other treasure; it makes life happy and gives one's soul strength not to betray one's ideals. The third thing that I understood is that violence, hatred and injustice cannot and will never be able to create anything eternal in intellectual, moral or material realms.

Confession by Leo Tolstoy

All the great writers of Russian literature discussed themes dealing with the purpose of man and the understanding of human life.

In 1881 Leo Tolstoy completed his *Confession*, in which he honestly and sincerely tried to describe his own life's path. Tolstoy's spiritual search can help us to think about our own life, to see how important and difficult this search is.



Coming to the end of our discussion about the search for meaning, let us try to follow this path together with Tolstoy, especially because in *Confession* we can see those stages of self-understanding that can be found to some extent in every person's life.

When talking about his childhood, Tolstoy emphasizes that his outlook inherited from his parents was not truly his own: "I had never believed very seriously but had merely trusted in what I was taught and in what was professed by my elders."

Childhood is followed by the teenage years, when one often rejects one's previous childish beliefs. The soul awakens; one faces the questions about the meaning of everything for the first time. "I ceased to believe in what I was told in my childhood, but I believed in something. ... Now, looking back at that time, I can clearly see that the only real faith I had was a belief in perfection. But what this perfection consisted of, and what its aim was, were unclear to me."

Years pass. They encompass Tolstoy's participation in the war, his coming back to St. Petersburg, and the start of his career as a writer. "During this time I began to write out of vanity, self-interest and pride. In order to achieve the fame and money for which I wrote, I had to conceal what was good in myself and display what was bad. And this is what I did."

Many people follow such a path. Having entered a profession and achieved a certain position in society, they accept blindly the existing norms and rules and never doubt them. The thought of excluding oneself from the general rhythm of life is too frightening to do otherwise.

But Tolstoy didn't merely start to have doubts; step by step he came to a state of deep personal crisis. And what is even more amazing, it happened when his talent was blossoming, when he was at the peak of his success as a writer. (Perhaps it's not so wise to believe that external success guarantees peace of mind.)

All this was happening to me at a time when I was surrounded on all sides by what is considered complete happiness. I had a kind, loving and beloved wife, lovely children, and a large estate that was growing and expanding with no effort on my part. Relatives and friends respected me far more than ever before. I was praised by strangers and could consider myself a celebrity without deceiving myself. ... And in this state I reached the point where I didn't want to live. ... I couldn't give any reason either to any of my actions or to my life in general. ...

What will come out of my life? What should I live for, why should I desire anything, why should I do anything? ...

And I started to look for answers to my questions in all the knowledge that people gained. I was searching passionately, not out of mere curiosity, not casually, but was searching desperately for days and nights as the one who is about to die searches for salvation.

Tolstoy describes how first his desperate search for meaning led him to the realm of empirical knowledge, and then to the realm of philosophy, and nowhere did he find an answer. Was there any meaning to life?

I searched through human knowledge for an answer to this question, which is the same whatever way it is expressed. I found that according to their relation to the question, all branches of human knowledge are divided, almost into two opposite hemispheres. ... One branch of knowledge does not even seem to acknowledge the question and yet gives clear and precise answers to its own independently posed questions: This is the realm of empirical knowledge. The other realm of knowledge recognizes the question but does not answer it. This is the sphere of speculative philosophy. Empirical disciplines ignore the questions of life. They say: "As for what you are and why you live, we have no answers and do not involve ourselves with it. On the other hand, if you need to know about the laws governing light, or about chemical combinations, or about the laws governing the development of organisms, then we have clear, precise and irrefutable answers to all this. ... "

And whenever the other side of knowledge, the speculative realm, sticks firmly to its principles and gives direct answers to the question, it has always, throughout the ages, given the same answer: The universe is something infinite and incomprehensible. Man's life is an inscrutable part of this inscrutable whole ... and instead of an answer all one gets is the same question, only put in a more complicated form.



The agony of his search for meaning brought Tolstoy to the brink of suicide, and it is faith that helped him to come back to life — that very faith that he had rejected in childhood.

In addition to rational knowledge, which I hitherto thought to be the only knowledge, I was inevitably led to acknowledge that there does exist another kind of knowledge — an irrational one — possessed by humanity as a whole: faith, which affords the possibility of living. ...

Faith is the force of life. If one lives, he believes in something. ... One cannot live without faith.

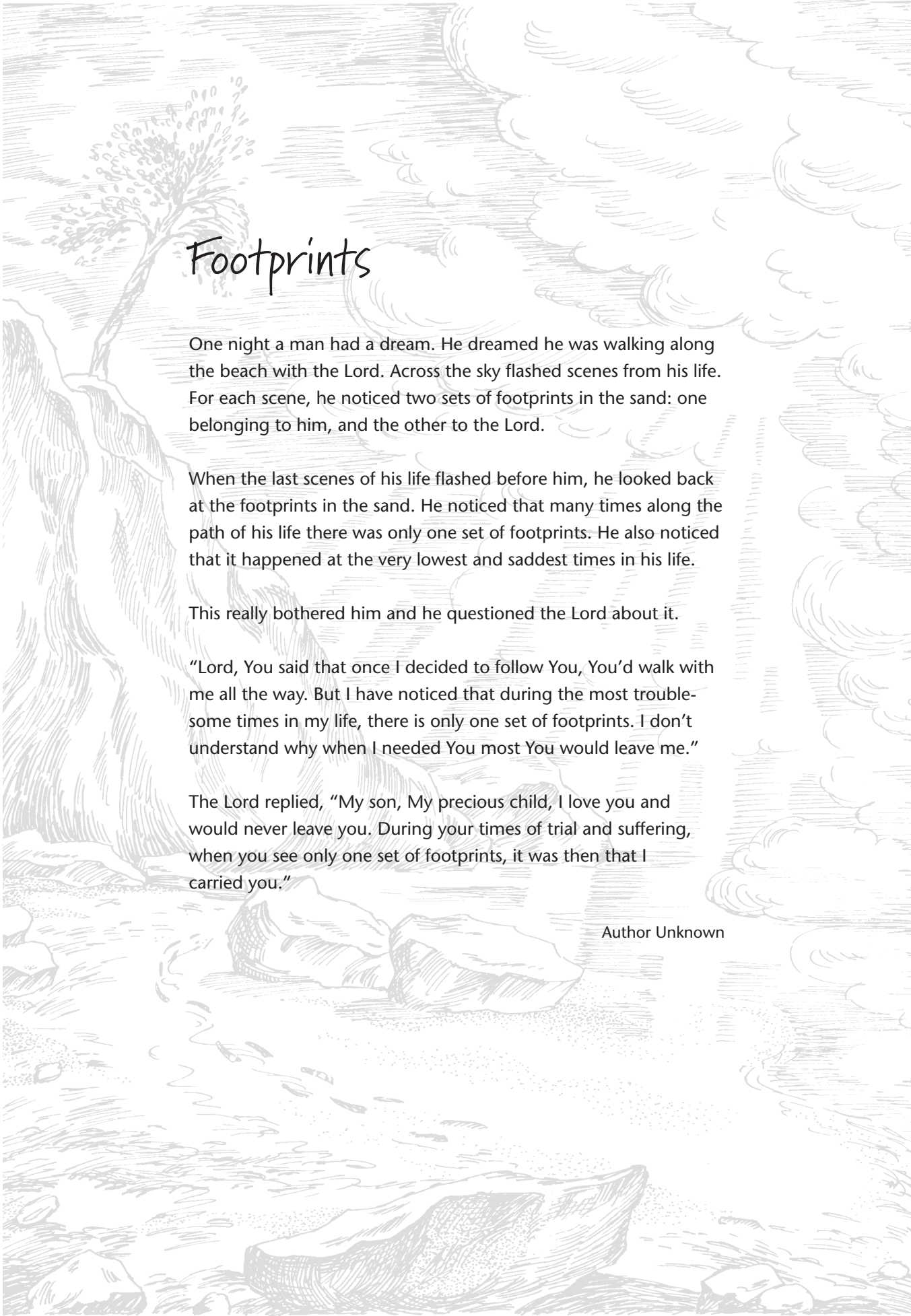
I understood that I had lost my way and how I lost it. I lost my way not so much because my thinking was wrong, but because my life was evil. I realized that in order to understand the meaning of life, one needs to lead a life that is not meaningless and evil, and only then to apply the intellect so as to understand it. ...

I looked at myself and at what was going on inside me. I recalled the hundreds of occasions when life had died within me only to be reborn. I remembered that I only lived during those times when I believed in God. What are these deaths and rebirths? It is clear that I do not live when I lose belief in God's existence, and I should have killed myself long ago, were it not for a dim hope of finding Him. I live truly only when I am conscious of Him and seek Him. What, then, is it you are seeking? asked a voice inside me. There He is! He, without whom it is impossible to live. To know God and to live are one and the same thing. God is life.

Live in search of God and there will be no life without God! And more powerfully than ever before, everything within and around me came to light, and the light has not deserted me since.

And I was saved from suicide.

This was not the end, but only the beginning of a new stage in Tolstoy's search for meaning. It's not necessary to expect that our own spiritual search will lead us to the same answers as those of Tolstoy. The most important thing is to search for our own way.



Footprints

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand: one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord.

When the last scenes of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it.

“Lord, You said that once I decided to follow You, You’d walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don’t understand why when I needed You most You would leave me.”

The Lord replied, “My son, My precious child, I love you and would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.”

Author Unknown

CHAPTER 9

Science and Religion

Why was the kettle boiling?



John went into the kitchen and found that the kettle was boiling. He wondered why it was boiling. His older brother Jack came in. "Why is the kettle boiling?" John asked him. Jack, who is a science student, explained that 3 million years ago a forest became compressed and through its decay produced a reservoir of gas. Then 20 years ago some people with a rig drilled a deep hole to discover whether there was gas there or not.

There was, so they capped the hole and connected a pipe to it. This pipe led into a network of pipes, one that comes out here (pointing at the wall). Then the gas, which comes out of the ring on the stove, combines with the oxygen in the air. (Where the oxygen comes from is another story.) Someone ignited the combustible mixture with a match made of phosphorus or an electric spark, and it ignited. That's why there is a flame.

The methane and oxygen combine together and turn into water and carbon dioxide. The byproduct is a lot of heat. The kettle, which is metal so that it con-

ducts the heat quickly, contains water. The heat causes the water molecules to move more energetically until some of them have enough energy to break free of the surface tension and enter the air. This is steam. That is why the kettle is boiling." "Thank you," said John, "but why is it boiling now?" "Oh!" said their mother as she walked into the kitchen. "I put the kettle on so that we could have tea."

Which explanation is correct? Both. But they approach the question from different points of view. Thus the answers are different. Neither is complete. They are complementary. Jack explains how it is that the kettle is boiling. Their mother explains the purpose for having it boiling and thus gives meaning to it.

It is part of human nature to ask the questions Why? What? and How? We have an inborn desire to understand the world that we inhabit and to find meaning in it. Religion, philosophy, and science all developed partly as an expression of this quest

for knowledge and understanding about the nature of reality. For much of history there was little distinction between these different paths. They jointly satisfied man's basic need and responded to his intuition that the universe is meaningful, ordered, rational, and governed by some form of justice, even if its laws are not transparent. Religion, philosophy, and science developed together, and in their approaches they were intuitive and rational at the same time. The priests were the first astronomers, and the medicine men were both prophets and physicians. Philosophers tried with the use of reason to comprehend the whole of reality.

More recently, though, philosophy, science and religion have divided, each developing its separate area of competence. Natural science has focused upon explaining and understanding the material dimension of reality, while religion has focused on the spiritual dimension of reality. In part this division came about when some religious people tried to claim sole authority for interpreting the material reality. In response, some scientists dismissed religion as only superstition and attempted to reduce religious experience to human delusion.

Yet the relationship between philosophy, science and religion can be related to the story *Why was the kettle boiling?* Philosophy, science, and religion are different ways of looking at and understanding the same phenomena. It is not that one is right and the others are wrong. The three disciplines ask different questions and naturally give different answers. In this sense they are complementary. Each has its area of competence.

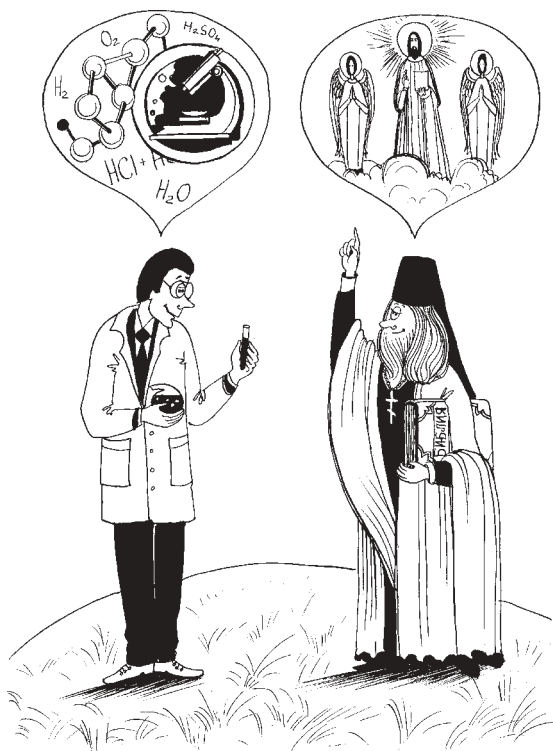
- ✗ Questions about the nature of the world, what it is and to what extent it can be understood by man belong to the area of philosophy.
- ✗ *How* questions about the way the world works are often regarded as properly belonging to science, particularly the natural sciences.
- ✗ *Why* questions about the purpose and meaning of the world and life are considered the domain of religion.

Many people think that science and religion are mutually exclusive or that one discipline's claim to truth outweighs the other. In other words, some people think that if one follows science, belief in God is not an intellectual option. And some devout people believe that certain scientific facts about the world are unacceptable and should be rejected due to conflict with their religious beliefs. The view that science has somehow "disproved religion" is not borne out by the facts. For instance, it is no accident that modern science developed mainly in the West. Christianity and Islam provided a framework of thought within which science could develop. This framework includes notions such as:

- ✗ The world is created good and is therefore worth examining. ("God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." Gen. 1:27)
- ✗ God made the world in a rational and orderly way so that it is capable of being understood mathematically, systematically and scientifically.
- ✗ Nature is not to be worshipped in itself, so people are free to examine it.
- ✗ Technology is a valid means of "subduing the earth" (Gen. 1:28), and it is therefore morally right to experiment and create.

The Creation Story

In the Bible there is an account of the creation of the world in six days. How should one understand this? If it is understood as literally true, one has to dismiss either the biblical account or the scientific account of the world's origins. However, to think that the Bible story is meant to be a scientific account is to misunderstand the



nature of the Bible. The Bible includes poetry, law, proverbs, prophecy, history, songs and even jokes. It provides deep insights into the nature of man and human history. But when we read it, we have to bear in mind the cultural background of those people who — many centuries ago — wrote down the biblical texts, often using metaphorical language, and their intended audience.

So when the opening verses of the Book of Genesis say, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” this is not to be understood as a modern scientific statement. Although the biblical account of the creation is surprisingly scientific in one sense (the order of creation more or less follows modern geological and evolutionary accounts), it was also written to convey other messages. The statement that God created everything means that nature and the physical world are good. This view can be contrasted with other worldviews which regard matter as evil, meaningless, chaotic or to be feared.

Throughout history, religious people have tried to reconcile their faith with the foremost philosophical and scientific discoveries and methodologies. For example, early Christian thinkers showed how Greek philosophy was supported and

completed by Christianity. St. Augustine, one of the most notable theologians in early Christian history, developed his perspectives based on Plato’s philosophy, while St. Thomas Aquinas did the same using Aristotle. Muslim philosophers and naturalists, such as Averroes and Avicenna, followed Muhammad’s instruction to “seek knowledge even if it be in China.” Averroes (1126-98) was the greatest Arab philosopher who expounded the Koran according to Aristotle. Avicenna (980-1037) was an Arab philosopher and physician from Uzbekistan. His medical system provided a foundation for Western medicine and included treatment for smallpox and painless operations under anesthetic. Their achievements laid the foundations for modern science. In fact, many important scientific discoveries, such as the zero used in mathematics, were made by Muslims during the Middle Ages, when science was comparatively undeveloped in Europe.

At different times in history religions have lost their vitality and creativity, falling into dogmatic patterns of thought and behavior. The Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, for example, allied itself with Aristotle’s views and accepted his

conclusions as fact, but neglected his method of open-minded critical inquiry. At that time people were overly respectful of ancient authorities and did not verify conclusions for themselves. One result of this was the clash between Galileo and the Vatican. The Church acted beyond its sphere of competence in trying to determine which astronomical theory was correct. However, this celebrated case was not typical of the relationship between science and religion. Throughout the Renaissance and the golden age of humanism, the Church celebrated scientists, along with the leading artists. Benedictines, Dominicans, Franciscans and Jesuits in turn were the leaders of research into the natural world. Later we find that many eminent scientists were believers in God, including Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Newton, Darwin, Lomonosov and Einstein. They found no contradiction between their scientific views and adherence to a faith.

The Creator gave to mankind two books. In one He showed His majesty, and in another His will. The first is the visible world ... and the second is the Holy Scriptures. Science and religion are sisters, daughters of the Most High Parent, and there can never be conflict between them, if nobody, out of vanity and from desire to show his “wisdom,” will blame them.

— Mikhail Lomonosov
18th century Russian scientist

The nature of science

Science is a magnificent human endeavor to discover the structure of the world and the laws that govern its working. Many different sciences have developed to examine different areas, and the same phenomena can be studied by different sciences in different ways. For example, the human brain can be studied by physicists, chemists, biochemists, anatomists and psychologists. Generally we make a distinction between:

- ✗ **Natural sciences:** physics, chemistry, biology, geology, etc.
- ✗ **Social sciences:** psychology, sociology, linguistics, economics, etc.

Science is in many ways a spiritual adventure, conducted by people of great imagination, creativity, insight, intuition and intelligence, into a world of unobservable entities, invisible forces and waves, all inter-related at a more profound level than anything we have yet managed to penetrate. Scientists have a passionate desire to understand the world and to discover knowledge. In many cases they could have used their talent and knowledge in other ways to become rich, but knowledge and understanding was more valuable to them.

Science is also a communal enterprise. The results of independent initiatives are evaluated by other scientists in the scientific community. Over a period of time a consensus is reached by dialogue over which theories best fit the known evidence. It is not unusual for theories that are later accepted to be initially rejected because they challenge the received and established scientific suppositions of the day. In this respect scientists, being only human, are often as dogmatic as religious people. For example, even though Charles Darwin published his book *The Origin of Species* in 1859, it was not until the middle of the 20th Century that his ideas were generally accepted by most biologists. In fact, most of the opposition to the theory of evolution came from scientists and not from religious people.

The opposition to natural selection continued unabated for some eighty years after the publication of the *Origin*. Except for a few naturalists there was hardly a single biologist, and certainly not a single experimental biologist, who adopted natural selection as the exclusive cause of adaptation.

— Ernst Mayr
Harvard professor of zoology

Throughout history many scientific discoveries have been rejected by a scientist's own contemporaries and only accepted by a later generation.

Often more than one theory about a phenomenon is accepted by different, well-respected scientists. Theories "compete" with each other. The one which is best wins until it is itself replaced by a better one. During the 1950s, for example, there were two theories about the origin of the universe which were equally well respected. One, the "Steady State" theory, has subsequently been set aside in favor of the "Big Bang" theory because subsequent evidence has confirmed the second and not the first. In a similar way today, one can see different theories competing in their explanations of earthquakes or the origin of oil. In fact, our understanding of nature is never complete and is always being improved.

The scientific method

Scientists in general are motivated by a desire to understand how the world is organized. They search for patterns and laws that will enable them to grasp the hidden order, and they develop theories that seek to explain the phenomena they study. An unusual phenomenon may arouse the curiosity of a scientist. He may have some idea, a hypothesis, of what is happening and then design an experiment to test that idea. As he accumulates evidence, general features may begin to emerge, and he develops a theory that should be able to account for this phenomenon and maybe



make predictions about other phenomena. Often scientists use models and analogies to try to explain and understand their theories. For example, the atom is often said to be like a miniature solar system. Of course, an atom is not literally like a solar system, but such models help us to visualize what we cannot see.

However, the whole enterprise of science rests on basic beliefs about the world which themselves are not subject to scientific or rational proof. These notions are assumptions, basic ideas that we believe in without any proof. These are:

✕ **Rationality** — Our thought processes make sense and are basically reliable.

✕ **Intelligibility** — The world can be understood.

✕ **Orderliness** — Nature is an orderly system — a *cosmos* (from the Greek word meaning universe and order), not a *chaos* — and it is worthwhile searching for patterns which can be summarized as scientific theories and laws.

✕ **Uniformity** — The main laws of nature remain the same and apply everywhere in the universe and not just here on earth. In other words, the law of gravity is the same on Mars as it is on earth.

✕ **Causality** — For every thing that happens in this world, there is a cause. We would be very surprised if things started to happen for no reason at all.

To the sphere of religion belongs the faith that the regulations valid for the world of existence are rational, that it is comprehensible to reason. I cannot conceive of a genuine scientist without that profound faith.

— Albert Einstein

Historically, these assumptions are partially derived from the religious view of the world mentioned above. Far from being the source of certain knowledge, science itself is dependent on assumptions with a religious origin. That the whole of science rests on foundations whose validity it is impossible to prove is embarrassing to many scientists. The greatest scientists have all thought and written about this problem.

Furthermore, when we look at the history of science, we can see that scientific knowledge is always tentative and never certain. This is because scientific theories are only approximations of the truth. They are like maps that describe the land-

scape but can never represent all the detail in it. Scientific theories are attempts to describe and explain reality, but none is able to explain everything. Always there is some aspect of reality that will not fit into the tidy scientific theory. Such problems are usually the starting point for new and deeper discoveries about the structure of the world.

As time goes by, old theories are discarded or modified and replaced by new ones that seem to fit the facts better. Still, scientific theories can never be proved. No matter how many times a theory is verified by observation or experiment, it only takes one exception to prove the theory wrong or at least incomplete. This is true even for such a fundamental assumption as causality. In the 20th Century it was discovered that there is a lack of a distinct point of causality in the realm of elementary particles. So, after surveying the history of science, one might conclude that any theory will be discovered to be false within, say, two hundred years of being propounded.

I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself and now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.

— Isaac Newton

Great scientists have always recognized that no matter what science could explain, most discoveries opened up doors to still greater mysteries. What we know is far outweighed by what we do not know.

As we noticed earlier, science and religion have always been linked together. In the past few hundred years, science has gone ahead with new discoveries and seems to have left religion behind. As the mechanistic suppositions of 19th century science have been undermined by advances in the 20th century, science has now started to investigate the invisible world, the world of mind and subatomic

particles. Many scientists experience a sense of wonder when they look at the world. They have an intuition that there is more to the world than meets the eye.

It is more important to have beauty in one's equations than to have them fit the experiment.

— Paul Dirac
British physicist

The limitations of science

Which of the following questions can be answered by natural science?

- ✗ How are atomic bombs made?
- ✗ Should we make atomic bombs?
- ✗ How does the human organism function?
- ✗ What is the meaning of human existence?
- ✗ How does a compact disc work?
- ✗ Is playing a compact disc enjoyable?
- ✗ Why are the laws of nature mathematical?
- ✗ Why do the laws of nature exist?

Natural science enables the understanding and prediction of events in the physical world and their control through technology. It has enabled us to have a far higher standard of living than ever before in human history. Through modern agriculture, it has become possible for the earth to support a large population; and through medicine the lifespan of the average person has been greatly extended. But has scientific knowledge always benefited mankind? If not, can science provide the values that should govern its use?



There exists a realm of reality that until today natural science has not explored. You cannot measure the beauty of a sunset with a multimeter. Material happiness alone cannot completely satisfy us. Can science explain about values, love, beauty, and friendship? Just because such questions cannot be answered by science does not imply that they lack meaning.

The nature of religion

Religion is a very complex phenomenon, but one aspect of it reflects the desire of people to understand the inner essence of life — not only what is happening but why it is happening. Religion focuses on finding the meaning of events and the meaning of our lives. It tries to answer the “ultimate questions” that life poses, such as:

- ✕ Was this world created?
- ✕ Does God exist?
- ✕ What is the origin of good and evil, and what is the difference between them?
- ✕ Why is there suffering?
- ✕ Is there life after death?
- ✕ For what purpose — and how — should I live my life?

Religion can be described as the ultimate quest to discover the nature of the Ultimate Reality. In this sense it overlaps with science. This is why Albert Einstein said, “I want to know God’s thoughts.”

The heart of religion

The founders of religions undertook a spiritual quest, which always involved great suffering and hardship, to try to solve life’s mysteries and discover the true way of life. Through this process they gained profound insights into the nature of the human situation and spiritual reality. Often they called these insights “revelations” because they felt that their knowledge had come through a personal encounter in which some Ultimate Reality was revealed to them.



In the past, people sometimes accepted the existence of many gods. This is the way it was in ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome. In other places and times, they gave this Ultimate Reality one name, such as “God,” “Yahweh” or “Allah.” Yet they were also deeply impressed that they had only glimpsed, barely touched, the surface of God’s nature. God was a Mystery that could never be fully comprehended. God’s depth was unfathomable. These revelations of the Divine Being are the primary source of religious knowledge and truth. In this sense, the source of religious knowledge is experiential and not rational. Reason is used to reflect upon and more deeply understand this primary experience.

Because it is impossible to adequately describe this Mystery, religious language is full of similes and metaphors such as “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed” and “God is our heavenly Father.” Human concepts have to be used to try to describe and communicate what is indescribable. Someone once said, “To speak of God, we should be at once poets, musicians and saints.” Of course, metaphors have to be

understood correctly. Muslims liken God to a king because in their culture the word “king” refers to a person who is wise and just and protects his people. As in science, where models are also used, there is always the danger of taking the metaphor too far and equating the metaphor with the reality, forgetting that it is merely an aid to understanding. A famous Taoist saying captures the problem of the limitation of language in talking about such matters:

The Tāo that can be spoken of
Is not the everlasting Tāo.
The Name that can be named
Is not the everlasting name.

The lives of the people who encountered this Mystery were changed dramatically. When they started to share the content of their revelations with others, they attracted many followers, who found that by following the teachings of the founder, they too could grow spiritually and develop a deeper relationship with the Divine Being. This was the origin of the various religions. Religious teaching has endured for thousands of years. Each religion has also remained to a greater or lesser extent open to further revelations. Religious people recognized that the Mystery they had encountered could never be limited and would continue to reveal more and more of itself. This is why the founders of many religions taught that in the future further revelations would be given.

As religions passed through generations, the founder’s teachings often became dogma. Believing the “correct” things about the Way often became more important than its sincere practice. Many religions lost their spiritual vitality and declined into empty formal ritualism, and this is why several major religions of the ancient world faded away and were replaced by newer, more vital ones.

The life and teachings of the founders of these religions were written down and became what is known as “scripture.” Scripture can be compared to a textbook teaching the truth. All too often, though, it became equated with the truth itself, and new insights and other textbooks were rejected. It was during periods like this that religion and science came into conflict.

Evaluation of religious truth

Just as scientific theories have to be evaluated, so do *religious teachings*. There are many different religious teachings that we can learn about in the world today. In the past, a single view tended to be accepted and became dominant in one area. Often the religious authorities in that area had a vested interest in the acceptance of their theory, and they rejected and persecuted other views. Today, however, it is much easier to learn about other ideas. In one sense this can be very unsettling and confusing. Different religions may challenge our own ideas, but this process can be an opportunity for growth and development.

In the study of science we do not have to discover for ourselves the laws of gravity. Nor do we just accept the theory on the basis of authority. At school we ourselves work our way through the same calculations so as to understand how the theory works. In this way we can inherit all that Newton discovered and make it our own. We can discover for ourselves the beauty of his theory. In the process of learning well-established theories, people sometimes find insights that lead to new discoveries. Religious teachings should be examined in the same way. While authority is important and should be respected, we should test religious knowledge through our own lives to make it our own. In this way we ourselves will gain new insights and realizations.

Despite the fact that there are many different religions, we find that there is a general consensus among them on many important moral matters. The moral and

ethical teachings of all religions recognize that murder, adultery, theft, addiction, dishonesty, greed, selfishness, and pride cause harm to others and harm to ourselves. All religions teach about the value of honesty, humility, righteousness, love, loyalty, purity, respect and self-sacrifice. However, on questions concerning the origin of evil, the reason why God created man, life after death, and the purpose of life, among others, each religion has its own theory and emphasis. These differing views can be compared and evaluated. However, the best laboratory for religious research is inside ourselves. Through study, reflection, prayer and meditation, we can decide which view gives the most satisfactory explanation of the reality of the human situation. We can discover which ideas best help us to understand ourselves. We can learn which one may offer a solution to the problems humankind faces, and which solution is the most realistic and effective in daily life. Our views on these matters will probably develop and change as we grow and mature.

Human culture needs both science and religion to develop. These two disciplines represent complementary paths to a fuller discovery and understanding of the world in which we live. There is no need to claim the authority of one over the other. Science is able to reveal the nature of the physical world, and technology enables us to create a comfortable living environment. However, the cultural purpose of science and technology can be misdirected without the values often derived from religion. These values provide meaning and seek to ensure that scientific knowledge is used responsibly and for the benefit of all. As Albert Einstein said, “Religion without science is blind, and science without religion is crippled.”

Questions for Discussion



- How do you understand the statement “To speak of God, we should be at once poets, musicians and saints”?
- What did Paul Dirac mean when he said, “It is more important to have beauty in one’s equations than to have them fit the experiment”?
- How are metaphors and models used in science and religion?
- In what ways do science and religion pursue a complementary path for truth?
- Why has there sometimes been conflict between the scientific and religious ways of looking at the world?
- What are the values that should guide scientific research?
- What values should govern the way technology is used?
- In what contexts might it make more sense to say that a scientific description of the moon is better than a poetic one and vice versa?

The quest for truth

There are many occasions in life when we criticize and disagree with others and sometimes even come to blows. Why? Sometimes it is because we can only see things from one point of view — our own. Suppose you saw someone standing with a bloody knife over a dead body. What would you conclude? Is the person a murderer? Maybe he was defending himself, maybe he was a passerby and tried to help the victim by removing the knife. Often we don't know all the details. In the course of an investigation, many witnesses are called to testify in order to build up as complete and accurate a picture of what took place as possible. The different

testimonies are compared for discrepancies, and the value of each individual's testimony is carefully weighed. It is like trying to do a jigsaw puzzle.

In this book we are looking at many questions that do not always have easy answers. They have to be thought about and examined in some depth. Sometimes a person will spend his whole lifetime thinking about a question or an issue that is very important to him. This quest for truth and understanding is very human. Just because it is not always easy to find the answer or even to understand it when we do, doesn't mean that such a quest is pointless.

The value of freedom lies in its enabling us to search for understanding.

Creating an atmosphere in which people can have the freedom to pursue the truth is not easy. It requires that each person:

- ✗ listen to what another person is really saying to make sure that he understands the way that words are being used. For example, when two people argue about democracy, sometimes they don't mean the same thing. One person may associate it with equality and liberty, the other with anarchy and selfishness.
- ✗ be honest and accurate in the way he portrays other views and other people. For example, Protestants are mistaken when they accuse Orthodox believers of idolatry because they bow in front of icons.
- ✗ be discerning and recognize that although people are sometimes hypocrites, one should be careful not to "throw the baby out with the bath water." Just because one doesn't like a person, this doesn't mean he may not be right or have a good idea. Of course, the opposite may also be true.
- ✗ realize that profound questions do not give rise to easy answers. While it is true that I can write on either one side of a piece of paper or the other side, I can't write on both sides at the same time. However, many other issues don't fit into a precise "this" or "that" framework. For example, a person can do both good and bad deeds. To say a person is either good or bad is too simple. Nor does one have to either like or dislike modern music. There is a whole spectrum of possible views.

✗ be prepared to argue for what is true and against what is false, while still respecting the person holding the opposite opinion.

In evaluating a belief or an idea, there are many questions that can be asked, such as

- ✗ Is it logical or inconsistent?
- ✗ Is it practical or unrealistic?

The evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the present generation; those who disagree with the opinion even more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the chance to exchange error for truth; if wrong, they lose the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth produced by its collision with error.

— John Stuart Mill
19th century English philosopher

I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.

— Voltaire
18th century French philosopher

- ✕ Is it supported by well-tried traditions or is it idiosyncratic?
- ✕ Is it beneficial or harmful when practiced?
- ✕ Does it open the mind to the possibility of greater understanding or close the mind and make it dogmatic?
- ✕ Is it in accordance with universal values or is it a minority opinion?
- ✕ Is it potentially welcoming to all insights or is it dismissive of others?

None of these questions by itself is enough to decide for or against a particular belief, but taken together they are a fairly good way of weighing it up.

There is a famous Buddhist story that illustrates the problem we face in trying to understand the world in which we live. It is easy to see things from only our own point of view, more difficult to see things from another person's point of view, and even more difficult to grasp the whole picture. Like all good stories, this one has many different levels of meaning and can be understood in many different ways.

The Blind Men and the Elephant

"Once upon a time," said the Buddha, "there was a certain prince who called to his servant and said, 'Come good fellow, go and gather together in one place all the men who were born blind and show them an elephant.'

'Very good, sire,' replied the servant, and he did as he was told. He then said to the blind men assembled, 'Here is an elephant.' And he led each blind man to a different part of the elephant. Then each of the blind men was asked to explain what an elephant was like.

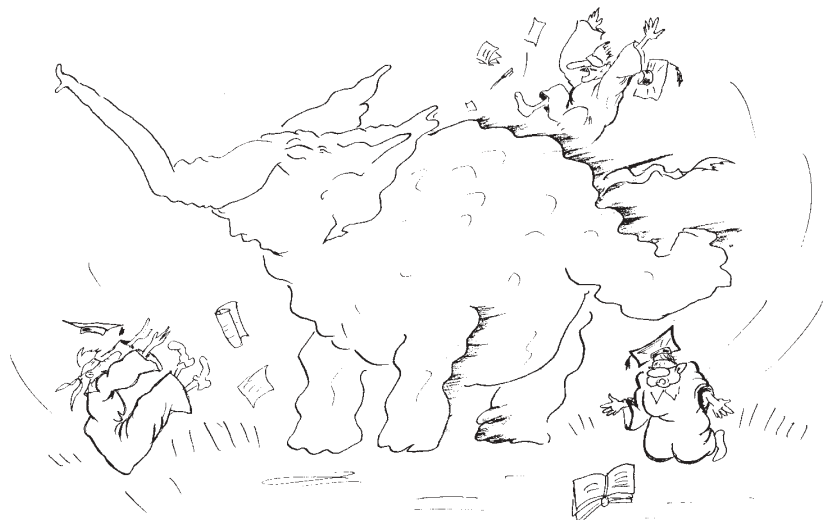
"The first blind man, who had seized hold of the elephant's tail, said, 'An elephant is like a snake. It is long and skinny and moves to and fro all the time.'

"The second man had seized the elephant's leg. 'You're wrong,' he said. 'An elephant is like a tree.

It is wrinkled and round. I can barely get my arms around it.'

" 'Wait,' cried the third man, who had grabbed the elephant's trunk. 'An elephant is like a large hose with a hole in the end that sucks up water.'

" 'You are all wrong,' exclaimed the fourth man, holding the elephant's ear. 'An elephant is like a flat, hairy piece of burlap. It flaps all over the place, but it is much thinner and flatter than a hose or a snake.'



“ ‘What are you saying?’ asked the fifth man, who had hold of the elephant’s tusk. ‘An elephant is smooth and hard, like a smooth rock, and it also has a point on the end that could harm a person.’

“Then they began to quarrel, shouting, ‘Yes it is!’ ‘No, it is not!’ ‘An elephant is not that!’ ‘Yes, it is like that!’ and so on, till they came to blows over the matter.”

Something to
think about



- How does the story teach us to regard people who have beliefs different from our own?
- What can we learn from such people?
- What is truth? If so, can it be known?
- Are there limits to tolerance, and what might they be?
- How should we respond to and interact with people who hold beliefs different from our own?
- Have you ever had the experience of thinking that you understood everything about a person or a situation, and then finding out later that your view was very one-sided and incomplete?
- Is there only one valid way to understand and interpret the world and our experience?

CHAPTER 10

The Divine Nature

The question about what we may call the Ultimate Reality or, in the terminology of Western religions, God, is one of the big questions of human life. How we see this Reality, whether it exists or not, and, if so, what we think God is like, will shape our view of the world and our place in it. It may profoundly influence the kind of people we become. Some have argued that, if there is no God, then “all is permitted”. As Dostoyevsky wrote in *The Brothers Karamazov*, “crime must not only be permitted but even recognized as the most inevitable and the most rational outcome for every infidel!” In this view, a godless world is a world without moral judgment. It is a world where the strongest and most selfish rule. On the other hand, if we not only believe in an Ultimate Reality, but see in it the source of all that is good and true, then we may naturally feel that life has purpose and meaning. We have motivation to develop our character and pursue a life of goodness. We believe that in the end virtue will be rewarded.

Since the dawn of time, people have been pursuing this “ultimate question” through religion and philosophy. People have alternately seen God as knowable and mysterious, transcendent and immanent, unchanging and passionate. Some have seen the Ultimate Reality as either a personal or impersonal Being, or as Truth that is neither being nor non-being. People have said that God is One, yet has many manifestations, like different sides to a person’s personality. Many religions, though not all, see God as the creator of the universe.

The question of God's existence

If we look at the course of human history we find that the great majority of people have believed in a Supreme Being of some kind. Virtually every major civiliza-

tion throughout history has been based upon some sort of religious belief. If not, then people ended up instituting a kind of pseudo-religion. This phenomenon strongly suggests that human beings have an innate religious sense which throughout all of human history has caused them to seek for God. Where does this sense come from? Some will say that this in itself is evidence that God does



“The highest expression of man’s life—the climax of the evolutionary process and still a biological fact—is his spirit, the inner, questing, desiring, aspiring part of him....The human spirit is a bridge to the Divine. Man’s spirit, rooted in life, may actually be part of the Universal Spirit, emerging from it and returning to it again.”

— E. W. Sinnott
20th century American biologist

exist—that in our inner being we are seeking to return to our origins.

Others have argued for God’s existence using a philosophical approach based upon natural law. Through nature we notice that for every observable phenomenon or effect there is a cause. If we see a kettle of water boiling on the stove (our example from Chapter 9), we quickly surmise that the fire beneath the kettle is the cause of this event. We can go further back. What is causing the fire? The answer to that depends on whether you have an electric, gas, oil or wood-burning stove. Now we can consider a more profound question. What is the origin of life? No doubt you have asked yourself this question. Well, we may say that we, or any form of life, came from parents, be they human, animal or plant (the source of the seed). But where did those parents come

from? Of course, from their parents, and we could trace it all the way back to the first life form. But then, where did that come from? Indeed, where did anything come from, in its ultimate sense? Finally, we get to the question of the origin of the universe.

Using this line of reasoning, and that all of this had to have come from somewhere, many people have said that there must exist a First Cause. Some choose to call this First Cause God, while others use the title Allah, the Absolute, and many other names. Determining who or what this First Cause is has been the source of philosophical, religious and personal inquiries and speculation for thousands of years. Using logic, as we have here, people have tried to prove God’s existence through their rational minds. We may observe also that down through history, in many different settings, countless people have claimed to have had personal experiences with God, some receiving revelations, others having feelings of ecstasy from being in what they thought was God’s presence. However, despite all of this seeking, the ultimate reality of God has always seemed to be beyond our limited ability to understand. Finally, we cannot put God into a box or category of human understanding. As God said in response to Moses’ question about his identity: “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14). God just is. We humans live in a material world of time and space. Our minds and consciousness are bound by this reality. God, if he exists, inhabits a realm beyond time, space and matter. Because of this, our limited minds may never be able to fully comprehend the Ultimate Reality. We have to be careful not to reject the notion of a God, however, as many have done, simply because we cannot understand it.

Our purpose here is not to “prove” God’s existence or non-existence. Probably this is impossible. But there is a great deal of evidence that points to the probability of the existence of an Ultimate Reality. Assuming that it does exist, let us move on to the question of the nature of this Reality.

How can we know what God is like? Clues from nature

If we think about the nature of cause and effect, we notice that the characteristics of any effect are already contained in the cause. Thus, a seed coming from an apple tree will, without doubt, produce another apple tree. There is no chance that you’ll get an orange, pear, plum or any other kind of tree out of that seed, no matter how many times you try. Similarly, human babies are born from human beings. Not only that, but those babies are likely to look a lot like their parents. If it is true that God is the First Cause of our universe, then we ought to be able to tell something about God’s nature by observing the characteristics of the universe. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote in his letter to the Romans: “For what can be

known about God is plain to (all), because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.” It means that we ought to be able to find evidence of God’s nature by looking at the world around us.

In Chapters 4 and 5 we discussed some basic features that we find throughout nature and the universe. We noted that every being possesses both an inner nature and an outer form. Every being also has a positive and negative aspect that is expressed in the living world as masculinity and femininity. Hence, we can assume that the Ultimate Reality also contains these same features. In other words, God has an inner nature of personality or character, and an outer form of energy and matter. We may also say that God, as a living entity, is a harmonized being of masculinity and femininity. When we look at the religions of the world, we find that each of them emphasizes some of these characteristics while de-emphasizing others. This is because we are like those blind men we talked about in the last chapter who feel only part of the elephant—in this case, the elephant being God.

Thus, while the religions of the Western world (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) speak about a personal God, those of the East see God more impersonally, as the source of all energy or as a principle (such as the Tao). Having a personality, the Western God is more active and initiating while the God of Eastern culture tends to be more passive and contemplative. Christianity, Judaism and Islam see God primarily as a masculine being while the Shinto religion of Japan and some Hindu traditions speak of God as a female deity. Some emphasize God’s masculine characteristics such as disciplining, guiding and fearlessness and others speak of the more feminine characteristics of comforting, nurturing and compassion. Rather than considering them to be in contradiction, we can think that the various religions of the world simply are relating to different aspects of the same one God. Actually, most religions believe that there is but one true God, by whatever name we want to call him, her or it. (You will notice that, in this chapter, for convenience sake, we are usually referring to God’s masculine aspect).

God's inner nature

How can we know God’s inner nature that, as we understand from Chapter 4, describes the essence of any being? What is the essence or core of God’s being? Of course, as we have said, God, being an invisible, transcendent reality beyond time and space, can never be fully knowable by we finite human beings. However, if we take the previous argument one step further, surely we can discover something more about God’s nature.

Genesis 1:27 tells us that “God created man in his own image...” Human beings, as the most developed of all living creatures, according to this passage resemble God’s very own nature. Although by studying an image we should not expect to gain complete knowledge about its source, a deep understanding of our own human nature should reveal something about God’s nature. In Chapter 6 we explored various aspects of human nature, the primary of these being intellect, emotion and will. If human beings have intellect, emotion and will, then God also must have intellect, emotion and will. It means that God thinks, feels and has desires to do things, to accomplish something. In other words God is a living being with a personality with whom we can have a relationship.

Do you remember what we said was the deepest part of our nature, that which harmonizes and combines our intellect, emotion and will? It is our desire to give and receive love, which springs from the deep recesses of our heart. Our intellect, emotion and will are all meant to be used to express love. For God, it would be the same. God is a being of heart and love who, like man, seeks to experience joy through giving



and receiving love. In fact, as creator, God is the origin of all true love.

Although religions see God in many different ways, they all testify to the fundamental goodness of the deity (see the passages at the end of this chapter). It is a goodness arising out of God's desire to love and be loved.

If this is so, then we can realize that God himself has a need to be in relationship with others in order to experience love. Perhaps the common image of God as an old man sitting high on some remote throne is far off the mark. Rather it may be that God is, and always has been, intimately involved with the world. God, as a being of heart and love, is deeply affected by everything that goes on in the world. Thus, God may be closer than we think, closely watching and participating in world events—and in each person's—your—life.

God as creator

Seeing God as the First Cause of the universe also implies God's creatorship. Indeed, most religions of the world consider that somehow, in some way, God created the universe. Science has discredited literal interpretations of the creation accounts

given in various scriptures, such as the passages in the Bible and Koran saying that God created the world in six days. Nevertheless, if these accounts are read more symbolically, understanding that they were not written by persons with scientific knowledge, they can be seen as containing some fundamental understanding concerning the cause of our existence.

Some accounts liken God's act of creating to that of a mother giving birth to a child. If so, we can consider the creation of the universe as a labor of love in which God invested his whole heart and being. It suggests an intimate relationship between God and the creation. We may think that every aspect of this creation is infused with God's energy, from the smallest subatomic particles to the vast galaxies. More internally, it is also infused with God's love, which answers the question 'why did God create?' We have already spoken of God's need to be in relationship in order to be able to experience love. If this is true, the fundamental purpose of the creation may be to manifest love in order to produce joy.

The image of God as a mother giving birth also implies that the activity of creation is ongoing. The mother's investment does not end with the birth but, in a sense, is only just beginning. She must nurture, guide and shape her child to become all that it can be. So too, God has been guiding us, involving himself in our lives in many imperceptible ways. In this sense the act of creation is a continuing process. Our own creativity, on a completely different plane from the rest of creation, is another expression of our likeness to God's nature. When we use our creativity to demonstrate our love for God and our fellow human beings, we are coming to resemble God's divine nature.

The problem of evil

When we examine our own nature in the attempt to know God, immediately we are confronted with the problem of evil. We know that we have evil, selfish tendencies that thwart the good that we would do. If we had only this as a guide, then we would have to conclude that God, too, must be self-contradictory and self-destructive. The reality of evil in the world has been one of the strongest arguments against the existence of God. The French author Dominique Morin writes:

...If God really existed and was good and all-powerful, as believers affirm, he could not have allowed evil and suffering. Here lies the root of many people's atheism. If God exists, why does he allow this curse?...The problem seems insoluble. As the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur asks in his book on evil, 'How can one affirm together, without contradiction, the following three propositions: God is all-powerful; God is absolutely good; yet evil exists...when only two of these propositions are compatible, never all three?'

Since we cannot deny the existence of evil, we must assume then that either God is not all-powerful or that he is not absolutely good. Although in moments of despair and hopelessness some have accused God of causing evil, and thus of being evil himself, most believers cannot imagine such a God. Certainly this kind of God is not worth honoring or worshipping. Such a conception goes against the views of God by all the world's religions which unanimously see God as a being of total goodness. The reality of evil is explained by these religions as originating through a countervailing force, often called the devil or Satan. The origin of this force or being has been debated, but it should be clear that such a force could not have existed from the very origin of the universe, otherwise the universe itself would contain an intractable contradiction heading towards self-destruction. Instead we find a universe of order and harmony, without such tendencies. The existence of evil is confined to the earth plane and specifically to the human race. It is human beings that commit evil, not God.

Thus, we must draw the conclusion that God is not all-powerful, at least in the sense that he does not control all human activity. He does not force human beings to be good. Rather, perhaps it is the case that God voluntarily has limited his power in order to respect our free will. We have mentioned that to be created "in his own image" means to resemble God also in the aspect of creativity. It may be that to allow us to inherit his creativity, God chose not to control human beings like robots, but to be free to make choices (subject to God's guidance) and create. In allowing us freedom, we can understand that he was taking the risk that human beings might misuse that freedom and bring evil into the world.

Yet there may be an even more profound aspect to this, which is that God was willing to assume such a risk not only to preserve creativity but primarily for the sake of love. God's deepest desire, as a being of heart, is to experience joy through love. But in order to experience love in his relationship with human beings, as those most closely resembling him, he had to allow us the freedom to choose to love him. Can you be forced to love someone? Have you ever been successful in forcing someone to love you? It doesn't work, does it? Neither can God force us to love him. By loving us unconditionally, his hope and expectation was that we would love him in return unconditionally. If we realize this, then how painful it must be for God when we fail to return that love and instead engage in evil selfish acts. The Bible and other scripture are full of references to God's grief and suffering over man's betrayal of his love:

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.

— Genesis 6:5,6

Relating with God

If we are to find God for ourselves, we must understand the reality of God's situation. To have a close relationship with anyone, you must be able to understand and relate to that person's heart. Isn't that true in your closest friendships? The more you understand each other's hearts, the closer you can be, the more you can trust, and the more you can share with each other. It is the same in a relationship with God. First we must understand God's situation. If we have the wrong idea about God, we can never develop a true relationship with him.

We see from the foregoing discussion that we are separated from God because of the evil and selfishness within us. We have all experienced moments when we were hurt or betrayed by a friend, or, if we are honest, when we hurt someone else, due to our selfish behavior. We suddenly feel very distant from that person. It can happen even if the action was not intended to hurt. It doesn't matter. Selfish actions cause pain in the hearts of those who care for us. We must understand God's situation in this way.

If we look at human history we find that those who had deep experiences with God were those who made sincere effort to overcome their selfish tendencies, who tried to close the distance between themselves and God by first recognizing characteristics within themselves that would be difficult for God to love and then trying to change themselves. Generally speaking, if we want to "meet God", we have to be honest with ourselves. We have to overcome the urge to excuse our selfishness. Just because "everybody does it" doesn't make it right and certainly doesn't help us come closer to God.

God has an absolute standard that he wants us to meet. Of course, God loves us unconditionally, but if we want to *experience* that love, we have to train ourselves not to give in to our selfish desires. God's heart is drawn to those who practice a life of self-denial and living for the sake of others.

Think of it in this way: What if you were going to meet the president of your country, or perhaps your favorite musician, someone you would give your "right arm" to see? How much would you prepare beforehand to meet that person? Probably you would pay special attention to your appearance, your clothes, your hairstyle. And you would probably spend hours rehearsing what you would say and how you would say it when the great moment came. Then, how much more should you prepare yourself to meet God? Of course, in meeting God, your internal preparation of heart and mind is much more important than your external appearance and behavior. God sees into your heart and wants to relate to you on that level. What is important to God is the purity and sincerity of your heart.

In history, people's experiences with God have taken many different forms. The Old Testament recounts Moses dramatic encounter with God at the burning bush (Exodus 3). Later we read of the prophet Elijah's hearing God's "still, small voice" (I Kings 19:12). Jesus, of course, had a special intimate relationship with God. For



him, God was “Abba” (Papa). Muhammad received the words of God through the angel Gabriel in the depths of a cave. Eastern religions do not speak of encounters with a personal God, but do tell of spiritual awakenings, as with the Buddha’s experience of enlightenment under the Bo Tree. Many different forms—some would say there are many different paths to God—but in nearly every case the experience was preceded by a period of purification, sometimes through suffering, in which the person would have to overcome selfish temptation and choose a path of self-denial.

For some, their meeting with God was not only a revelation, but also a calling—a life-changing experience from which they would never turn back. The experience was a challenge to take up a mission, as with Abraham who left his family and traveled to a strange land to begin a new life. For them and others, the encounter with God developed into a living relationship in which one could variously experience God’s grace and forgiveness, a sense of being healed and liberated, a feeling of peace and enlightenment. For them, God was as real as one’s own parents or closest friend. Read the words of David in Psalm 23:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me besides quiet waters,
he restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

By studying the lives of the saints and great holy men of history, we learn that their relationship with God developed on the basis of a deep longing within their souls for communion with the source of their being. Such people felt a dissatisfaction with life as it was. They sensed profoundly that something very fundamental was lacking. Their feeling was that their physical lives were as a vast desert in which they suffered from a tremendous spiritual thirst. Such was their desperation to find the

One who could relieve their great thirst and hunger. Their yearning for God was overwhelming, so occupying their minds that they could think of nothing else until it was satisfied. It was in this kind of state that God would come to them.

We may never become like these saints, but we can still have our own close encounters with the living God. It depends upon the intensity of our desire. Experiences with God come in many different forms and occur in many different kinds of circumstances. God may come to us in our moments of deepest despair, or in times of great ecstasy. God may come as we struggle to get at the root of some problem that is afflicting us. Or we may experience God’s presence when we forget ourselves for a moment and see the pain and suffering in the eyes of another perfect stranger and we suddenly feel that this person

Have you not heard His silent steps?
He comes, comes, ever comes.
Every moment and every age, every
day and every night
He comes, comes, ever comes...
In sorrow after sorrow, it is His steps
That press upon my heart
And it is the golden touch of His feet
That makes my joy to shine.

— Rabindranath Tagore
Indian poet

is really our brother. God can come to us at any unexpected moment if we have a deep desire for such an experience.

In the end the quest for God, to understand his nature, is not an intellectual or academic one, but a quest of the heart. It is a quest to know from where we came—and why. Thus, we can say it is really a quest to find our Parent—the One who gave us life.

Something to think about



- Some people have said that it takes greater faith not to believe in God than to believe in God. What do you think of this statement?
- What manifestations of God can you find as you look at the world around you?
 - In nature...
 - In human society...
- Do you agree with the following passage? “God himself has a need to be in relationship with others in order to experience love. Perhaps the common image of God as an old man sitting high on some remote throne is far off the mark. Rather it may be that God is, and always has been, intimately involved with the world. God, as a being of heart and love, is deeply affected by everything that goes on in the world.”
- How would you resolve these incompatible propositions: God is all-powerful, God is absolutely good, yet evil exists?
- If God did not create evil, then from where did evil come? What makes human beings commit evil acts?

For Your Journal



Who is God to you? Does he or she exist or not? Give reasons for your answer. What experiences have you had that confirm for you that God does or does not exist?

The Love and Goodness of God

The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
The Lord is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.

Judaism & Christianity. Psalm 145:8-9

It is He who sends down to you out of heaven water of which you may drink, and by which (grow) trees, for you to pasture your herds, and thereby He brings forth for you crops, and olives, and palms, and vines, and all manner of fruit. Surely in that is a sign for people who reflect...

If you count God's blessing, you can never number it; surely God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate.

Islam. Koran 16.10,18

"I am the Tathagata,
The Most Honored among men;
I appear in the world
Like unto this great cloud
To pour enrichment on all
Parched living beings,
To free them from their misery
To attain the joy of peace,
Joy of the present world,
And joy of Nirvana..."

Buddhism. Lotus Sutra 5: Parable of the Rain Cloud

To love is to know Me,
My innermost nature,
the truth that I am.

Hinduism. Bhagavad Gita 18.55

It is the Way of Heaven to show no favoritism.
It is for ever on the side of the good man.

Taoism. Tao Te Ching 79

The Master said, "Is Goodness indeed so far away? If we really want Goodness, we should find that it was at our very side."

Confucianism. Analects 7.29

CHAPTER 11

Religion and Society

When paleoanthropologists are trying to decide whether some remains they have discovered are human or not, they look for evidence of religious practice. This is because from time immemorial human beings have buried their dead, a sign that they believed in life after death. Such evidence includes the existence and nature of burial sites. Even Neanderthal man buried his dead, often ceremonially and with gifts such as flint weapons, ornaments and even food, suggesting a belief in a life after death.

During the 19th Century, paintings done between 25,000 and 10,000 BC were discovered in extremely inaccessible caves in France and Spain. Most of the paintings are of animals that were hunted, but there are also pictures of magicians or sorcerers.



These discoveries indicate that the earliest known human beings held a belief in the mysterious nature of life and a sense of the sacred.

We obviously cannot know what such people believed or what rituals they performed. However, in primitive societies existing today in which the lifestyle resembles that of extinct primitive societies, anthropologists find the people are very religious. In fact, there has never been a society that was not religious. Despite the sacrificial lifestyle it demands, the persecution it sometimes invites, and the recent secular emphasis in society, religion has persisted. Even so-called atheistic societies have been religious in a distorted way with their symbols, ruling ideology and personality cults.

What is religion? Many people have asked this question, and many different answers have been given. Religion is so pervasive that it is actually difficult to give a completely satisfactory definition of it. The word itself comes from the Latin word *religare* meaning “to re-bind,” implying that although man is

connected to God by creation, he has to bind himself back to God by his own choice. Although most people think that religion always has something to do with God, Buddhism is a religion that does not believe in God. Here are some definitions of religion:

"Religion is the acknowledgment of a dependence on a superhuman being expressed through acts of cult."

— Christopher Dawson, 20th century English religious philosopher

"Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness."

— Alfred North Whitehead, British philosopher and mathematician

"Religion is the opium of the people."

— Karl Marx

"True religion is the cult of the ancestors, the cult of all the fathers as one father inseparable from the Triune God, yet not merged with Him."

— N.F. Fedorov

"Religion is comparable to a childhood neurosis."

— Sigmund Freud

"Religion is a community of individuals living a life pursuing and in accordance with internal truth through a relationship with the transcendent Being."

— Nicholas Zernov, Russian author

Why study about religion?

If you do not feel religious, you may wonder why you should learn about religion. There are several good educational reasons.

- ✗ Studying different religions gives us the opportunity to look at the world through someone else's eyes, to develop the skill of empathy.
- ✗ Historically a large proportion of the world's population has been religious. Therefore, to understand one dimension of what it means to be human, we should understand the phenomenon of religion.
- ✗ Religion is playing an increasingly important part in world affairs. There is a religious dimension to many of the world's conflicts. To have a proper understanding of what is taking place and why, it is important to understand the religious convictions and practices of the people involved.
- ✗ It is impossible to understand a nation's history and culture and the motivations of historical figures without understanding something about their religion.
- ✗ Religion has been one of the most important repositories of human wisdom and experience. This inheritance belongs to everyone. As Goethe said, "He who cannot draw on three thousand years is living from hand to mouth."

What is the origin of religion?

Although when we are born we cannot speak a language, within a couple of years each of us learns how to communicate. Every person is born with a natural ability and predisposition for learning languages. Since religion is also so widespread, it would appear to be something natural, something very deeply connected to what it means to be human.

Although religion is a many faceted and complex phenomenon, it can be seen as a response to:

- ✗ man's quest for answers to ultimate questions such as the meaning of life, suffering, and life after death
- ✗ the desire for standards by which to live one's life
- ✗ the desire for community

The satisfaction of these human needs has been fulfilled through three important dimensions of every religion, which we will now discuss:

Religion and culture

Every religion has a particular understanding of the world, a belief that there are one or more gods who desire a certain conduct on our part. Primarily, people believe that these gods desire to be worshiped. Thus religion is more than just belief in God or gods; it also involves various rituals and prayers done to please Him or them. In ancient times the gods were thought to be pleased through the offering of gifts or sacrifices, often of animals, either in recognition of a blessing received, such as the birth of a child, or to induce a gift from the gods, such as a good harvest. This latter motive often degenerated into magic and superstition. In the major world religions today, animal sacrifice has been replaced by spiritual sacrifice through self-denial, prayer and good deeds. It is generally believed that God is more concerned about people being good than about being given burnt offerings.

A wide variety of rituals have been developed by which people worship God. Through ritual, religious people make time and space sacred. It is a way to sanctify and remember certain events of one's life or the history of one's people. Some rituals are personal, while others are communal. Often these rituals are very elaborate. Some examples are the Christian Eucharist, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, and the Jewish holy days. Many of the rites of passage in human life, such as birth, the attainment of adulthood, marriage and death, have associated religious rituals that imbue the event with meaning and significance.



The religious worldview, and accompanying rituals, have been a primary root of cultures all over the world. A religion's view of the world is often expressed in the form of myths which are not mere fairy tales but embody profound truths. One cannot understand European culture without being deeply impressed by the overwhelming influence of Christianity, which has been the inspiration for some of the greatest music, architecture, literature and art. Some of the greatest music was composed for religious events, and religion has been one of the most common inspirations for art. Michelangelo, the greatest of the

Renaissance painters, was deeply religious and drew on religious themes for his best paintings. Many of the most beautiful buildings are religious sanctuaries, such as churches and temples. Drama, too, has grown out of religious rituals and is often concerned with religious themes. While Christianity has profoundly influenced Europe culture, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism have similarly contributed to the culture of the Far East; Hinduism to India; and Islam to the Middle East.

The earliest, most formative and often most respected literature of every culture has been religious. The Koran, for example, is universally regarded as the best literature in the Arabic language.

For many Christians, their written language and history began with the translation of the Bible into their native tongue. For instance, if we look at Russian history, we see that the first Christian missionaries, Cyril and Methodius, devised the Slavonic script. They translated the Bible for their Christian converts because they wanted them to be able not only to listen to the biblical parables but also to read them in their native language. If we remember now what we know about the history and



culture of medieval Russia, we can see that it was directly or indirectly connected with the history of Christianity. The authors of most of the historical chronicles were monks. The monuments of culture which have survived until today are mostly churches, due to the simple fact that they were the only stone buildings in Russia at that time, and they contained the frescoes and icons created by such great artists as Andrei Rublev and Feofan the Greek. In the Middle Ages there was no secular literature, and apart from the historical chronicles, only religious books have survived. Although made for churches, they were sometimes

so exquisitely designed that they are treated as works of art and are now kept in museums. And as for music, the oldest Russia has are the ancient canticles.

This knowledge gives us a deeper understanding of the soul of a nation, its complicated development, its hopes and sufferings. Although Russia, Germany and England, for example, are historically all Christian countries, Christianity has different characteristics in each. It is people, who have traditionally channeled their deepest feelings and resources into religious creations, who finally shape the expression of religion in a nation's culture.

Religion and morality

Religion is associated with a way of behaving and feeling that is regarded as right or good for us. Although the basis of society and its moral values is the family, religions all support the values that are necessary for the development and maintenance of the family, and thus of civilization. Some of these values are honesty, sexual propriety, and respect for ownership. Religion reinforces and invests meaning and significance in these values and shows how they are to be attained. One of the goals of religion is individual and communal spiritual perfection, although that may be defined differently by each religion.

Each religion charts out a course through which a person can achieve salvation. In the major religions, this course involves becoming self-disciplined and unselfish. In these religions no one can please God through ritual and sacrifice while ignoring his fellow man. Spiritual growth comes through self-denial and self-sacrifice rather than through ritual or magic. As we shall see, these religions have much in common in their ethical precepts, even if their beliefs are very different.

Though it is possible to construct an ethical system without a religious basis, in practice religion has been the main support for personal and family morality as well as social ethics. The primary source for religious ethics is God's revelation through nature, religious scripture and the lives of the founders of religions. For example, Christians regard Jesus Christ as the standard for their own lives. His life is the model for Christians to follow and emulate. Reason is used to reflect on and develop ethical

principles from these primary sources. Of course, there have been individuals who have lived moral lives without being religious, but there has never been a civilized society that endured without religion.

Religion and community

Religion is seldom just a personal affair. Although it is very personal, it always involves a community or association of people who share the same beliefs. Thus, religion provides not merely a belief system but also community, and emotional and spiritual support for its members. Many religions, such as Judaism and Hinduism, are family-oriented and many of the ceremonies take place in the home. It is through the family that the religion, its traditions and its attitudes are passed on.

Beyond the family there is also a community of believers — in Islam called the *Ummah*, in Buddhism the *Sangha*, and in Christianity the *Church*. There are usually leaders of the local and larger communities. Sometimes, though not in all religions, religious leaders play some mediating role between ordinary believers and God. Religious buildings also provide a focal point for the community: in Islam the mosque, in Buddhism the temple, in Christianity the church, and in Judaism the synagogue. Regular rituals of worship and many religious ceremonies and celebrations take place in these buildings.

The dark side of religion

In general, one could say that religion has been a force for goodness in society. Even today, most of the non-governmental, humanitarian projects around the world have a religious origin and are staffed by religious people.

However, one cannot ignore the dark side of religion. As well as light, life, joy and peace, religion is sometimes associated with:

- ✗ **intolerance:** the hatred and persecution of people of different beliefs, even to the point of killing them
- ✗ **obscurantism:** opposing intellectual, artistic and scientific advances
- ✗ **authoritarianism:** opposing intellectual, artistic, social and political freedom
- ✗ **dogmatism:** arrogant, stubborn assertion that what one believes is true
- ✗ **narrowness:** the view that only the members of a particular group will be saved while the rest of humanity is damned
- ✗ **hypocrisy:** preaching ethics while behaving in an antithetical manner.



It is often said that religion has been the cause of many wars. A closer look at such conflicts would show that there are usually other political forces at work, harnessing the power of religion for their own ends. Some religions are pacifist, but even those that are not have clear rules about when violence or war is justified and how it can be conducted in the most moral way. Revenge, aggression and unnecessary violence are always condemned, and peace, reconciliation and justice advocated. In fact, some of the main causes of recent wars have been tribalism, nationalism and expansionist atheistic ideologies. These

have rarely expressed a morality other than that the end justifies the means. Religion has tried to temper these aggressive impulses and bring reconciliation, but such teaching often has been swept aside when it stood in the way of human aggression.

When conflicts involve religion, it is because of the opposition of different beliefs and customs. Within a community in which everyone believes the same things and shares the same values, religion is not a source of conflict. Clashes may occur when different religions meet. Each side thinks its own beliefs and customs are right and superior to the other's. Such conflicts are especially intense when the religion is closely identified with nationality. In this case the problem is the lack of universal values that would enable people to respect each other despite their differences and to be able to live in peace together.

The "dark side" of religion exists because human beings themselves have a dark side. Although religious ideals and ethical norms appeal to the good side of human nature, the dark side of human nature easily subverts religion for its own ends. One should check to see if unethical activities of a religion are advocated or justified by the religion's teachings. They are probably not.

Belief and diversity

The founder of each religion discovered similar yet different insights and answers, thus forming a variety of forms in ritual and religious organization. Each religion, while having universal elements, is an expression of the individual founder's or believers' perceptions and the particular environment and historical context in which he lived. It is also important to remember that specific cultural and linguistic backgrounds influenced the way these insights were expressed. Just as each individual's thoughts and perceptions are unique, clusters of belief systems are also unique. The problem comes when a particular community claims that it has sole authority based on its necessarily limited insights. This sense of authority can lead one religion to disclaim and disapprove of the practices and beliefs of others in an inappropriate and often unethical manner.

One does not need to prove that one way of salvation is valid by attacking and denigrating other religions. This is more often than not an expression of insecurity, not conviction. For a person secure in his religious identity, other beliefs and customs can be enriching instead of threatening.

If we follow the historical development of religions, we see how gradually each has expanded from a belief shared by only one tribe to one embraced by whole nations and spread around the world. As these religions have developed, they have overcome national, language, racial and cultural barriers.

Especially during this century, religious leaders have recognized the many blemishes on the record of religious history. There has been an increasing movement toward dialogue between different religions. Within Christianity, the ecumenical movement has sought to bridge the gaps that divide Christians and are the source of conflict. Ecumenism searches for the underlying values that can transcend the historical differences and works toward unity in diversity. Different religions, too, have begun to engage in dialogue based on mutual respect for one another's journey of faith.

Universal Principles

It is evident in our world today that standards of morality differ from one society or culture to another. So you may wonder if all cultures or religions around the world hold any principles in common – or if there is no universal agreement on any principles.

We can find consensus on many values and principles among the most enduring of the world's religions.

Because these religions speak for so many of the earth's people and have stood the test of centuries, we can trust that when these religions all share a similar principle, that principle is considered universal.

Note, for example, the Golden Rule as expressed by the following six world religions:



Buddhism: For a state that is not pleasant or delightful to me must also be to him; and a state that is not pleasing or delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another?

— Samyutta Nikaya v. 353

Hinduism: One should not behave toward others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself.

— Mahabharata, Anusasana Parva 113.8

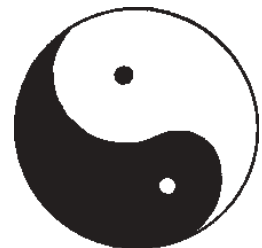


Judaism: What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.

— Talmud, Shabbat 31a

Taoism: Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain and your neighbor's loss as your own loss.

— Tao Te Ching



Islam: Not one of you is a believer until you desire for your brother that which you desire for yourself.

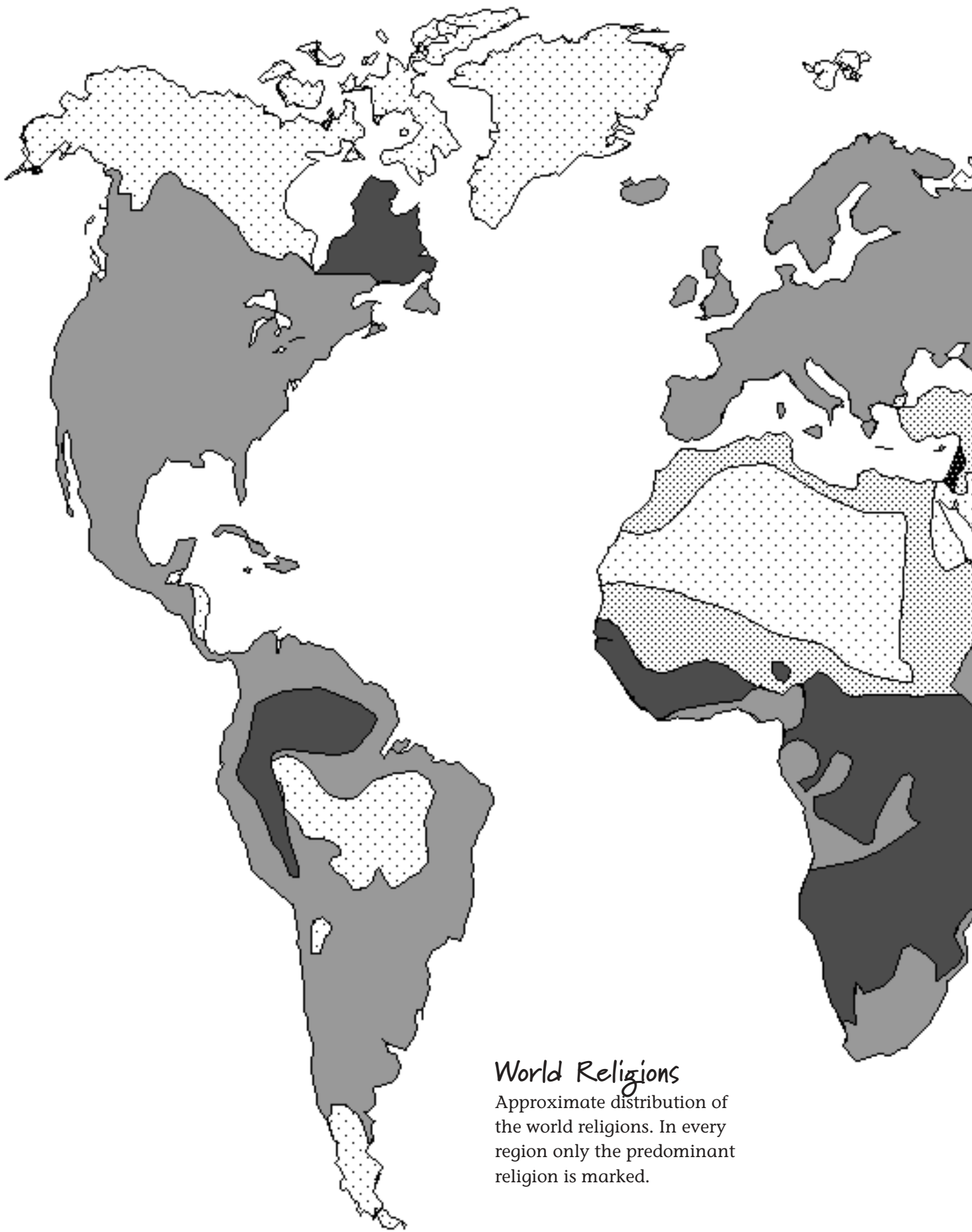
— Forty Hadith of an-Nawawi 13

Christianity: Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.

— Matt. 7:12

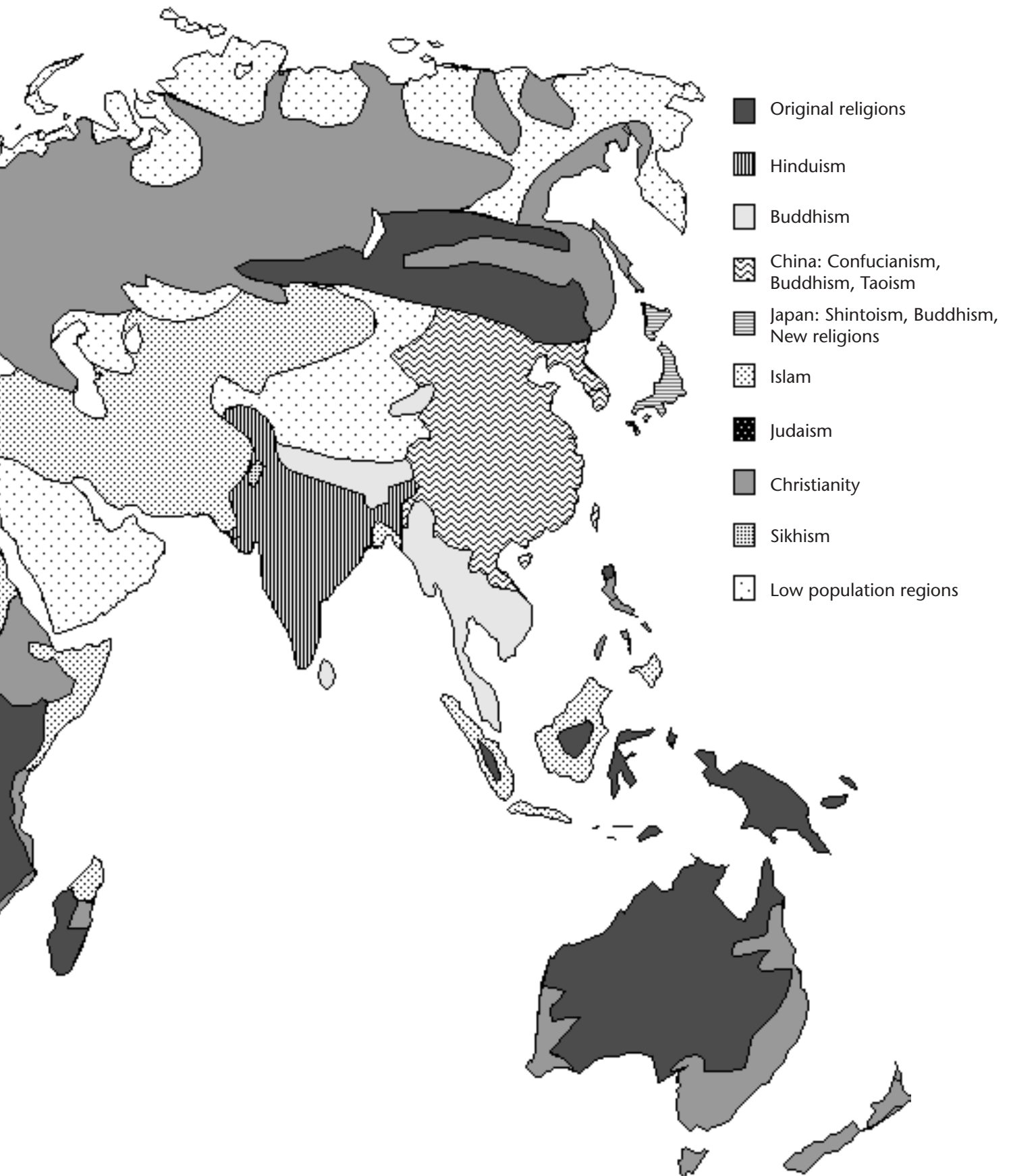


The universal principles that most of the world's people believe in do exist. These principles speak a deep truth about what it means to be human, and they transcend all cultures and religions. How they are applied to everyday life varies, of course, but there is a remarkable agreement on the principles themselves around the world.



World Religions

Approximate distribution of the world religions. In every region only the predominant religion is marked.



CHAPTER 12

Confucianism: The Life of Confucius

Background

China is the oldest continuous civilization in the world. Its culture can be traced back to the second millennium BC. By the sixth century BC, China was already an old society in which people looked back to the “good old days” of an ancient past. The Chou dynasty came to power in 1122 BC, following the Shang dynasty (1766 to 1122 BC). Earlier still was the prehistoric Hsia dynasty, founded by the sage king Yu, who was preceded by the legendary sage kings Yao and Shun.

The early Chou dynasty had been a Golden Age. People wore beautiful, subtly woven silk garments and used well-made bronze and pottery vessels. The wealthy lived in large houses with pleasant gardens. A calendar was developed based on the movement of the stars, musical notation was invented, and poetry was composed using ideograms. The Shang civilization revered an ancestor called *Shang-ti*, but in later times the Chinese people referred to an impersonal “heaven,” representing their ancestors and other supernatural beings collectively. The ancestors were worshiped, sometimes in brightly painted temples at the bottom of a garden surrounding the house.

Confucius and Lao Tzu, the two greatest sages of Chinese antiquity, lived in a period when the Chou dynasty had long since passed its glory. Chinese society was collapsing. The old regime had lost its legitimacy and anarchy reigned. Because of its corruption and failure to protect the people, the regime became the chief source of oppression and injustice. Its leaders had drifted far from the idealism of their predecessors. The old ideology that had sustained the regime for generations had been discredited. No longer were people prepared to serve the state or the society, since in the past they had been taken advantage of and the promised prosperity had not materialized.

With no leadership or accepted values to guide them, people started to ruthlessly pursue their self-interest, regardless of how others were affected. Parental authority was ignored as young people abandoned the traditions of their ancestors, which they blamed as the cause of past problems. Robber barons and gangs seized control of parts of the country, extorting tribute from those who lived or did business there. The government was unable and unwilling to protect the ordinary people from these thugs who grew rich off the hard work of others. Violent crime and robbery increased as people took what they wanted and settled old scores, knowing that they would not be punished.

The country was in debt and had lost its standing in the world. The surrounding nations which had been its vassals looked elsewhere for reliable allies. Realizing that the center had collapsed, the far-flung reaches of the empire were asserting their independence and snubbing the government. With the decline of unifying values and

traditions, each person did what was right in his own eyes. People did as they pleased, stole what they desired and violently abused those they disliked. Foreigners were treated as scapegoats for the current problems as people refused to recognize their own responsibility for the state of their country.

Confucius described this time as a “spring and autumn period.” This is a poetic way of saying that things started out well but became steadily worse. Both Confucius and Lao Tzu developed unique responses to this turmoil and confusion. Each embodied the essence of the traditional Chinese way of life. Their philosophies were different but complemented one another. Confucius attempted to discover the way to restore the lost traditions of social behavior and thus re-create Chinese civilization. Lao Tzu’s teachings were more enigmatic, articulating a way of life for changing and uncertain circumstances. Sometimes it is said that Chinese people are Confucianist in public and Taoist in private. The teachings of Confucius and Lao Tzu left a very deep impression on Asian culture and have been passed on from generation to generation.

Confucius

Confucius, or Master Kung, as he is known in China, was born in 551 BC in the province of Lu of a poor family who were of noble ancestry. Confucius’ father, a brave soldier and military commander, died shortly after the birth of his son, leaving him to be brought up by his mother. Although this was a difficult situation in which to start life, Confucius never denied his modest beginnings. “When I was young we were very poor,” he said. Then he added, possibly with a smile at his well-born pupils, “That is why I am skilled in so many menial things.” As a student, Confucius achieved all-round excellence, his studies ranging from archery, chariot riding and lute playing, to historical and literary scholarship. Together these pursuits constituted the ideal learning of the educated gentleman. He learned etiquette and the rites for the appeasement of ancestral spirits. One of the earliest traditions of his boyhood, in fact, relates how Confucius enjoyed creating his own ceremonies.

As a young man, he held several minor government posts. He was a capable administrator and, as the director of a granary, was noted for the fairness of his measures. Legend notes that when he was put in charge of the cattle and sheep, they quickly multiplied. During this period of his life Confucius immersed himself in learning. He discovered the ancient classics written on bamboo strips and read about the Duke of Chou, who became his hero.

The death of Confucius’ mother caused him great grief, and he mourned for 27 months as prescribed by tradition. He placed his mother in a temporary tomb while he returned to his home district to find people who knew the location of his father’s grave. He found the grave and re-buried his mother there. Even afterwards, he said that when he took up his lute his grief prevented him from singing.

Confucius became increasingly aware of the difference between the Golden Age and the time he himself inhabited. Rulers in the earlier time had been virtuous, and through them virtue had infused the land. This virtue could be found first in the rhythm of nature, then in the order of poetry and music. He studied music intensely to recover a sense of composure and order.

By the time he reached his late 20s, Confucius was the most educated man in the land. Despite his obvious ability, he did not receive the important and influential government posts he craved. Even though he was a man of few words, his outspoken nature prevented him from achieving a position of responsibility in a corrupt political system. Once, when the duke Ching asked him what he thought was the secret of successful





government, Confucius pithily replied, "Let the prince be a prince. Let the minister be a minister. Let the father be a father, and the son a son." Good government hinged upon creating a society where words meant exactly what they said. Thus, a prince had to have all the virtuous and noble qualities suggested by the word "prince." He should not, for example, be a philanderer or play the fool. Likewise, a servant should be a servant and not a secret enemy or rebel.

Confucius was eventually reconciled to the fact that his political career was going to be a failure.

Jealous courtiers made sure a person of such unimpeachable integrity did not make much progress up the hierarchy. He later commented to his pupils, "Do not worry about not having a high position. Worry about filling the one you have got." And still later, "Don't worry about who knows you. Just make sure you are worth knowing." Even though at times he was reduced to poverty, he knew that it was what was within him that determined his value: "In the eating of coarse rice and the drinking of water, the using of one's elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found. Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds."

Confucius left government service and opened a school which became the model for subsequent Chinese education. The main orientation of the school was how ethics could be practiced in society and, more importantly, how it could be applied to government. Its curriculum consisted of the traditional six disciplines: history, poetry, government, propriety, music, and divination. Although many of his students came from wealthy families, Confucius was proud to say that no student was ever turned away for lack of money. He had a very high opinion of education and its role in creating a civilized and harmonious society.

But he also gave his pupils this advice: "At home respect your parents. Away from home respect your elders. Be honest; love man; love what is good. If you have time afterwards, study." Study was to be based on the proper experience of life and was not simply the abstract accumulation of knowledge.

If a man loves kindness but doesn't love study, his shortcoming will be ignorance. If a man loves wisdom but does not love study, his shortcoming will be having fanciful or unsound ideas. If a man loves honesty and does not love study, his shortcoming will be a tendency to upset or spoil things. If a man loves simplicity but does not love study, then his shortcoming will be sheer following of routine. If a man loves courage and does not love study, his shortcoming will be unruliness or violence. If a man loves decision of character and does not love study, his shortcoming will be self-will or headstrong belief in himself.

— Confucius

Although a failure as a politician, Confucius was undoubtedly one of the world's greatest teachers. He attracted brilliant and devoted disciples. They were very struck by the manner in which he taught. He was always informal and instead of lecturing would converse on various subjects, asking questions and recommending reading. Although Confucius encouraged the study of the classics, he was notable among the ancient teachers for not placing an excessive emphasis upon learning by rote. "Suppose a man can recite all the Odes," he said, "and suppose he is on a mission of state; and then at a critical moment, it turns out that he doesn't know how to think. He may know the Odes, but he is not much use as a diplomat."

Often people find it difficult to study because they cannot see the point in accumulating meaningless facts and theories.

Confucius explained that before one could concentrate and study well, one needed to develop a certain attitude: “The superior person seeks neither a full belly nor a comfortable home, is quick in action but cautious in speech, and goes to those possessed of the Way to be put right. Such a person can be described as eager to learn.” Of himself he said, “I am not wise by nature, I have become wise through hard work.”

The following long passage is taken from the Great Learning, one of the Confucian classics learned by heart by Chinese schoolchildren for centuries.

The way of learning to be great consists in preserving man’s clear character, in giving life to the people, and in dwelling in perfection or the ultimate good. Only after knowing the goal of perfection can one have a definite purpose in life. Only after having a definite purpose in life can one achieve calmness of mind. Only after having achieved calmness of mind can one rest peacefully. Only after resting peacefully can one begin to think. Only after one has learned to think can one achieve knowledge. Things have roots and branches. A course of events has a beginning and an end. Therefore, to know the proper sequence or relative order of things is the beginning of wisdom.

The problem, as Confucius saw it, was that people were always looking for quick solutions to long-term problems. They tried to treat the symptoms but not the disease.

The ancients who wished to preserve the fresh or clear character of the people of the world would first put their nation in order. Those who wished to establish order in their nation would first set about regulating their family life. Those who wished to regulate their family life would first improve their character. Those who wished to improve their character would first make their hearts right. Those who wished to make their hearts right would first make their wills sincere. Those who wished to make their wills sincere would first achieve true knowledge. The achieving of true knowledge depends upon the investigation of things. When things are investigated, true knowledge is achieved; when true knowledge is achieved, the will becomes sincere; when the will is sincere, the heart is set right; when there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character; when there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home; when there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation; and when there is order in the nation, there will be peace throughout the world.

It has been estimated that 3,000 students graduated from Confucius’ school, of whom 72 became his close personal disciples. Once a king asked one of these disciples about his master. The disciple could not give an answer. When he told Confucius of the incident, Confucius replied, “Why didn’t you tell him that I am a man who forgets to eat when he is enthusiastic about something, who forgets all his worries when he is happy, and who is not aware that old age is coming on?” In this statement we see something of the joy of life, the enthusiasm and the positive, persistent urge to be active. One captures something of Confucius’ reputation for optimism in another anecdote. A disciple called Tzu-lu was spending the night at an inn, and the gatekeeper asked him where he came from. Tzu-lu replied that he was a follower of Confucius. The gatekeeper asked, “Oh, is he the fellow that knows that a thing can’t be done and still wants to do it?”

Confucius was not a religious leader in the conventional sense. He did not speculate or talk much about God or the gods. He said his ambition was “that the old people should be able to live in peace, all friends should be loyal and all young



people should love their elders.” When one disciple asked about serving the spirits of the dead, he replied, “You are not able even to serve man. How can you serve the spirits?” This followed from his motto: “Recognize that you know what you know, and that you are ignorant of what you do not know.” Still, Confucius had a sense of vocation and mission. He believed he had been called and sent forth by Heaven. This belief gave meaning to his life and sustained him, especially during his years of wandering and rejection. Although he kept his distance from popular religion and superstition, he was in his own way a devout person.

In the last years of his life he wandered from state to state offering advice to rulers. On several occasions he was forced into awkward situations in which he had to decide with whom his loyalty lay. With difficulty he avoided being co-opted into joining the government of an upstart dictator in the province in which he was living. When this ruler sought his advice, Confucius told him that he should learn to govern himself before trying to govern others. Despite his pointed criticism of such men, they rarely bore grudges toward him, sensing perhaps that his ideas were ahead of the times.

According to tradition, when Confucius turned 50, Duke Ting made him a governor. The policy he pursued can be guessed at from his statements “Misdistribution is a greater evil than scarce resources” and “Insecurity is a greater evil than poverty.” He was elevated to the post of Minister of Justice, and he observed that, “Among the ordinary people, the parents labor to sow and reap, but their sons do not understand hard work. They lounge in the streets, vulgar in speech, disorderly in behavior.” He eventually resigned from this post, as he could no longer serve the duke, who continually forgot his duties and behaved inappropriately.

Although later Confucianism as a state ideology came to be associated with the status quo and was used to support government authority, Confucius himself was very democratic in his outlook. He encouraged leaders to listen to the people and not to be too confident that their own opinions were necessarily right or best for the country. He said, “Heaven sees as the people see; Heaven wills as the people will.”

Everywhere Confucius went, he visited libraries and conducted historical research. In the process, he compiled and edited many books on Chinese traditions, music and philosophy. Once his disciple Tze Kung was asked how Confucius managed to learn so much about administration of the states through which he passed. “Does he demand information, or is it given to him?” Tze Kung replied, “He gets it through a gentle willingness to listen.” This habit of not talking much himself, but drawing forth from others all they knew, reinforced the suspicion of some people that Confucius was a spy. During this time Confucius was imprisoned and attacked on several occasions. He was often bitterly frustrated at not having been called upon for advice and having his wisdom put to use. In disappointment he cried out, “Am I only a gourd to be hung up to dry without being eaten?”

During all this time Confucius claimed that he was not an innovator. Instead he declared that he was merely trying to restore the lost ideal and traditions, saying, “I do not create. I only transmit.” He continually referred to the Golden Age of the Emperor Shun and pointed out that contemporary society was in confusion because it had forgotten the true way of life. This is one reason why Confucius spent the last years of his life editing the Chinese classics: so that they could be passed on to future generations. Still, his attachment to the past should not blind us to his originality. He creatively redesigned what he transmitted. “If by studying the past, a man learns to understand the present — only then is he fit to be a teacher.” Confucius initiated four of the characteristic features of Chinese civilization.

- ✕ He created the role of private teacher. Up until then officials relied on nothing but on-the-job training.
- ✕ He developed the contents, methods and ideals of Chinese education. Insisting upon broad liberal arts learning as a prerequisite for public service, he produced well-rounded and cultured gentlemen, rather than technicians or politicians.
- ✕ He accepted students from a variety of social backgrounds. No longer would mere noble birth guarantee entry into public office. He permanently destroyed the closed society of his time by disregarding the traditional privileges of aristocrats. Superior men, in his opinion, were made not born, made by their wisdom, education, idealism and social graces.
- ✕ He stressed the moral nature of education and politics. For him there was no such thing as learning for its own sake. As a man of integrity, he demanded that his disciples become trustworthy advisors to the government.

Confucius remained faithful to his quest. Power and wealth could have been his for the asking if he had been willing to compromise with those in authority. He preferred, instead, his integrity. He never regretted his choice.

In his old age, though, the bitterness he had carried since childhood was lifted from his heart. He mellowed and learned to curb his temper. However, he continued to be sorely disappointed. His son, who was not a great scholar, died before him, as did some of his closest disciples. He buried his disciples in the same way that he buried his son, since he regarded them all as his sons. Finally, Confucius himself passed away at the age of 72, certain that posterity would soon forget his name. Just before he died he said of himself:

At 15 I began to be seriously interested in study. By 30 my character had been formed. At 40 I had no more perplexities. At 50 I understood the will of heaven. At 60 nothing that I heard disturbed me. At 70 I could follow my desires without trespassing the moral law.

Although Confucius thought his own career had been a complete failure, within a few generations he was regarded as the great teacher of Chinese civilization. His disciples spread out across China as able administrators, gentlemen, scholars and teachers, professing, defending and transmitting certain modes of behavior and attitudes of mind. One, Tzend Tze, said, “Every day I ask myself three questions: Have I helped others? Have I been a good friend? Have I passed on what I was taught?”

CHAPTER 13

The Teachings of Confucianism

Customs and traditions are the glue that keeps a society together. Through generations of trial and error, certain ways of behaving are found to be beneficial. These customs are transmitted from generation to generation primarily through the family. In family life people learn the values and expectations of their society and how to behave appropriately. If a custom becomes outdated, it is naturally modified or gradually dropped. In such a society explicit laws are not needed, since people internalize these values and naturally do what is right.

Early China was neither more nor less turbulent than other lands. However, between the eighth and third centuries BC, the long-lasting Chou dynasty collapsed. The loss of its ordering power and authority was accompanied by social breakdown. Rival regional warlords and robber barons replaced central government. The noble code that had traditionally guided soldiers was also forgotten, and entire populations were sometimes put to the sword. People became more individualistic and self-centered. They no longer followed the traditional way of life or accepted the former sources of authority.

Out of this confusion emerged groups and individuals with conflicting and sometimes equally plausible solutions to the problems facing the country. Two of the most notable groups were the Realists and the Mohists:

The Realists

This group, led by Han Fei, claimed to have an answer for the anarchy that was erupting everywhere. They believed that:

- ✗ People are selfish, greedy, lustful, and lazy
- ✗ Force is the only thing people understand
- ✗ Clear, detailed laws are necessary
- ✗ Laws must be vigorously and harshly enforced
- ✗ Order is to be imposed and maintained by the rulers, who alone know what is best for the long-term good of the nation.

The Mohists

Offering a very different kind of solution were the followers of Mo Tzu. They thought that the conflict between people and states occurred because of a lack of

Universal love is to regard the state of others as one's own, the houses of others as one's own, the persons of others as one's own. When all the people in the world love one another, then the strong will not overpower the weak, the many will not oppress the few, the wealthy will not mock the poor, the honored will not disdain the humble, and the cunning will not deceive the simple.

— Mo Tzu

mutual love. So instead of force they advocated universal love.

Confucius could see that the policies being advocated by the Realists and Mohists would not work in the long term. He rejected the Realists' program because it was clumsy and externally oriented. Laws are appropriate for dealing with criminals but are too crude to regulate family and social relationships. Laws can stipulate the conditions of marriage and divorce but do not in themselves create a climate that generates love and companionship. He was also more optimistic about human nature.

In acting as a judge at lawsuits, I am as good as anyone.
But the thing is to aim so that there should not be any lawsuits at all.

Confucius also vigorously opposed the Mohists. When someone asked Confucius, "Should one love one's enemy, those who do us harm?" he replied, "By no means. Answer hatred with justice, and love with benevolence. Otherwise you would waste your benevolence." Furthermore, Confucius regarded such indiscriminating love as corrupting the very basis of society, since it denied there were gradations in love.

If one treats a stranger as one's father, one will end up treating one's father as a stranger.

It is only natural and indeed right to love one's parents more than other members of the family, other members of the family more than members of the same village, and so on until one reaches humanity at large. Benevolence is a natural extension of the natural love for one's parents to humanity as a whole. Therefore, for Confucius, to love without discrimination would be to deny one's parents.

Confucius' solution

Confucius recognized that the problem in society was the loss of values that accompanied the breakdown of tradition. This was why people had no sense of decency and no longer behaved properly. Confucius proposed to inculcate moral values through education so that individuals could cultivate their natural and normal state of goodness. Only if people would be good spontaneously and naturally would it be possible for the restoration of social peace and order.

Although he always appealed to the past for authority, Confucius was in fact an innovator. He did not aim to restore the old tradition, which he realized was neither possible nor desirable. Instead he proposed a modified, renewed and modernized tradition.

These are the main elements of Confucius' teaching that formed the basis for a renewed and enduring Asian civilization.

1. Jen

For Confucius benevolence (*Jen*) is the most important moral quality that a person may possess. It is the virtue of respecting others as one respects oneself. Confucius described this reciprocal ethical dynamic as the model for



A disciple asked, "Is there one single word that can be a guide to conduct throughout one's life?" Confucius replied, "Perhaps the word 'reciprocity' will do. Do not do unto others what you do not want others to do unto you."

Tzu Chang asked Confucius the meaning of Jen, whereupon Confucius replied: "To be able wherever one goes to carry five things into practice constitutes Jen." On begging to know what they were, he was told: "They are respect, magnanimity, sincerity, earnestness and kindness. With respect you will avoid insult; with magnanimity you will win over everyone; with sincerity men will trust you; with earnestness you will have achievement; and with kindness you will be well fitted to command others."

human relationships.

A person of Jen has such a large heart that he does not discriminate between people on the basis of their nationality, since for him "within the four seas all are brothers and sisters."

2. *Chun tzu*

Chun tzu reflects the ideal moral character to which everyone should aspire. It is usually translated as "gentleman" or "superior man" or perhaps just "mature person." Confucius uttered many sayings about what such a person should be like, often contrasting the superior man with the inferior man:

The mature person blames himself; the immature person blames others.

The gentleman understands what is right. The small man understands what will sell.

The gentleman helps others to realize what is good in them; he does not help them to realize what is bad in them. The small man does the opposite.

The gentleman is ashamed of his word outstripping his deed.

The mature person is friendly but not familiar; the immature person is familiar but not friendly.

The mature person dislikes those who like to criticize people or reveal their weaknesses. He dislikes those who, in the position of inferiors, like to malign or spread rumors about those in authority. He dislikes those who are headstrong but are not restrained by propriety. He dislikes those whose resoluteness is not tempered by understanding.

True manhood consists in realizing your true self and restoring moral order and discipline. If a man can just for one day realize his true self, and restore completely moral discipline, the world will follow him. To be a true man depends on you. What has it got to do with others?

3. *Li*



Confucius thought that an ideal social order could only be established through *Li*, the principle of mutual respect and courtesy, including the ideas of propriety, good manners, ceremony, ritual and the ideal social order in which everyone has his place. The social order should be a reflection of the good order and harmony that exist in the universe. An ideal society is one in which there is freedom, but this freedom does not lead to conflict and injustice because everyone is moral and behaves appropriately in relationships with other people. Parents would be good parents,

children would be good children, governments would govern well and people would be good citizens. In a society composed of Li everyone would live in moral harmony with each other. In such a society government itself would be unnecessary. This is why in answer to the Realists Confucius said:

Guide the people by governmental measures and keep them in line with punishments, and the people will try to keep out of jail, but will have no sense of honor or shame. Guide them by virtue and regulate them by Li, and they will, besides having a sense of honor and respect, reform themselves.

Confucius knew that people were not fulfilling their responsibilities. Governments instead of serving the people were exploiting them, fathers were not behaving as fathers ought to and sons were not being good sons. If people learned how to be good sons, fathers and rulers, then a harmonious and moral social order would naturally arise.

Confucius identified five relationships he thought made up the fabric of society. It is vital for a healthy society that these relationships be properly constituted. In each relationship there are appropriate ways of communicating and behaving. When we know how to behave in any situation, we feel comfortable and “at home” wherever we are. However, when we find ourselves in a situation in which we do not know how to behave appropriately, we are very uncomfortable. We feel “like a fish out of water.” Apart from being uncomfortable, it is easy to unwittingly offend others. This is why Confucius was so concerned about ceremony.

The Five Relationships

- Father and son
- Husband and wife
- Elder brother and younger brother
- Elder friend and younger friend
- Ruler and subject

Confucius wanted to re-establish the life of ritual, ceremony and courtesy. He realized that ritual brings about in a wor-

shipper a respectful or God-fearing state of mind. There is a right way to worship and particular rituals to be observed at the temples. There are proper ways for people to behave in public. There are proper protocols and formalities to be followed by governments. There are ceremonies for all the rites of passage: birth, adolescence, marriage and death. These rituals help to define the relationships between people. He said:

What are the human duties? Kindness in the father, filial piety in the son, gentility in the elder brother, humility and respect in the younger brother, good behavior in the husband, obedience in the wife, benevolence in the elders, and obedience in the juniors, benevolence in the ruler and loyalty in the subjects.

Confucius warned that when these ceremonies are disregarded, social chaos follows. If marriage ceremonies are taken lightly or even disregarded, marital relationships become difficult and promiscuity will become rampant. If the ceremonies of communal celebrations are ignored, the sense of order and discipline between elders and juniors is lost, and disputes and fighting will be common. If funeral rites are disregarded, the sense of gratitude of children toward their parents and deceased ancestors will decay, and people will indulge themselves. If diplomatic protocol is not observed, the relations between governments become strained and wars may follow.

Still more important than ritual is the heart behind it. As Confucius said:

When a man is not virtuous (Jen), of what account are his ceremonial manners (Li)? When a man is not virtuous, of what account is his music?



4. *Te*

Governments alone rule by power. However, Confucius recognized the universal rule that government based on physical force never lasts. It is oppressive and eventually crumbles because it lacks the support of the people. Showing no respect for the individual, it denies people freedom and responsibility. It has power but is without moral authority. Therefore, winning and keeping the confidence of the people are more important. This should be achieved through rulers' personal moral behavior and loving the people. *Te* is the moral power of example that enables good rulers to achieve their desires without force. According to Confucius:

When the ruler does what is right, he will have influence over the people without giving commands, and when the ruler himself does not do what is right, all his commands will be of no avail. If a ruler rectifies his own conduct, government is an easy matter, and if he does not rectify his own conduct, how can he rectify others?

To change his society and restore true values, Confucius put great emphasis on education, not merely of the intellect but of the whole character. When people can learn from the wisdom of scholars, they will not make unnecessary mistakes.

5. *Wen*

Finally, Confucius put great value on the arts. He recognized the power of the arts — music, dance and painting — to transform and influence people in the direction of goodness. When we hear great music, see great art, or watch a skilled dance performance, our spirits are lifted up and our souls are transfigured. The whole purpose of music and ritual is but to “set the human heart right” so that a harmonious social community can come about.

The ultimate victory, Confucius thought, goes not to the nation with the biggest army, but to the nation with the highest culture — the finest art, the noblest philosophy and the grandest poetry. It is these things that are spontaneously admired by people the world over. This is why again and again barbarian invaders have succumbed to a superior culture. Although China was invaded countless times, its conquerors almost immediately adopted Chinese customs and learning and were soon assimilated. The same happened to the barbarian tribes who invaded the Roman empire. They were awed by a superior culture and aspired to become Romans.

Did it work?

There are different ways to make a sizable impact on human history. Recently, scientific and technological changes have made great improvements in standards of living. However, if we look back, we will see that 2,000 years ago the Romans had central heating and built superb roads. All this was lost during the Dark Ages that followed the decline of Rome, and it is only recently that we have achieved a comparable standard of living. Although from the media one gets the impression that political activity is of the greatest significance, in the long run political change is seldom lasting and is often reversed. In any case, the ideals and values on which politicians base their policies have a source outside the realm of politics. It is the founders of religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism who have had the



greatest individual impact on human history. They were the ones who shaped the worldview and provided the values that have formed the background for science, politics, economics, art and literature.

The impact of Confucius' teaching supports this contention. Although his own career was undistinguished, he founded a class of scholars who were to become China's ruling elite. He himself became the most important figure in Chinese history. In 130 BC, the study of Confucian texts became the basic discipline for the training of government officials, a pattern that continued until the Chinese Empire collapsed in 1905. Confucianism did not merely affect government. Confucian values were so absorbed by the Chinese people that it is not possible to separate them.

For more than 2,000 years his teachings have profoundly affected a quarter of the world's population. The countries of East Asia, Japan, Korea and much of Southeast Asia deliberately imported the Confucian ethic. Confucianism was associated with and supported the feudal system. However, in the late 20th Century Confucianism has adapted to modern situations such as the free market.

Shaped by the Confucian ethic, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and now China itself have become the dynamic center of world economic growth. Many scholars now talk about the new century being the Pacific Era.

Something to think about



- What is the role of tradition in the preservation and transmission of knowledge and good behavior from one generation to the next?
- How do customs and traditions contribute to social peace?
- How would you have dealt with the social problems China faced?
- Why did Confucius reject the Realists' solution?
- How practical do you think the Mohists' proposal was?
- What do you think of Confucius' observation that if *"one treats a stranger as one's father, one will end up treating one's father as a stranger"*?
- Can you think of any people who have had *Te*, the moral power and authority to influence people?
- Does the most superior culture ultimately triumph?
- Why did Confucius put such great value upon education?
- Discuss the view that excessive reverence for tradition leads to the ossification of society.

Debate



"This side believes that force is the only way to re-establish social order"

"This side believes that one should love one's enemies"

CHAPTER 14

What Do We Live For?

One warm summer's evening, an elderly couple sat together outside their home watching the sunset. After a long silence, the man turned to his wife and, looking at the years of experience etched into her kind face, asked: "Is there anything that we have missed in all these years?" Looking at her husband, the old lady's mind was far away, thinking over many memories, both joyous and painful. "Yes," she said, "I wish I had given more of myself for other people." And the two looked ahead of them as they sat in the glowing remnants of the fading sun and pondered the thought.

Probably there is no one who does not think about what will become of him or her in the future. What will become of you in a few years? Maybe you will be studying at the college you are dreaming of now, maybe you will go into business, or perhaps someday you will become a great scholar.

Imagine you have gathered with your classmates to celebrate the 20th anniversary of your graduation. Most of your classmates have families, and you have children of your own. One of your classmates may be a famous scientist, another a doctor or teacher, and still another may be the president of a successful business. What things will have become the most important in your life by that time? What will you long to tell your friends whom you haven't seen for ages? Would you like to tell them about your work, your family, your new car, your trips abroad?

Can you imagine now the 30th anniversary of your graduation? Almost certainly the main topic of discussion (and pride) will be grandchildren.

While we are young, thoughts of our adult life may seem like fantasies. But time will pass, and what seems like the distant future will one day be reality.

What will we bring with us into our mature years? What will we be proud of? What will we regret? Perhaps if we think about it now, in the future we will not have to look back sadly and feel that it is too late to change anything.

Have you ever peered into an old person's face? Have you spoken to any elderly people other than your own grandmother and grandfather? Tomorrow, on your way to school, try to pay attention to these people in old-fashioned clothes hurrying to the shops early in the morning; try to



study their faces. Life may have become so hard for some of them that they think only about how they are going to live the rest of their lives, since their pensions are only enough to buy the simplest food.

There are other people for whom the events of *perestroika* have turned out to be a deep, personal tragedy. They lived all their lives by certain principles and ideals, thinking they were taking part in creating a bright future not only for their country, but also for the whole of humanity. Suddenly, in the last years of their lives, many of the things they had believed in proved to be false. It must be very difficult and painful for them. This disillusionment may be the source of their irritability and discontent, especially concerning young people. It is awful to find oneself in a situation like this. One cannot help but ask oneself: If there was so much falsehood around you, and you took part in it, willingly or not, then what is the meaning of your life?

But you may have come across other old people whose faces, in spite of their age, are full of inner beauty. You cannot trace any anger, irritability or vanity in them. They seem to have reached the declining years of their lives without any resentment from a difficult life, without any regret that life has passed by so quickly and that the only thing left to them is their increasingly helpless and unattractive old age. Despite



hardship, it seems that in the course of the years, some truth about the meaning of life has been revealed to them, which has nothing to do with external success.

Usually at this time of life a person's face becomes wrinkled, the hair begins to grow gray and thin, and the body is no longer beautiful. Power, money, and work — everything is in the past. What is the meaning of such a life? Is the value of life to be found only in recollections? Yet one does not live only in the past. What is the secret of those elderly people who seem to have an inner treasure? Where does their beauty come from? Maybe it is simply due to a more successful life; perhaps they did not experience the sorrow and grief

which have made other people old. Or have they just found a dignified way of overcoming difficulties?

It is worth thinking about old age before it is too late to choose one's own way of life. Then one might be able to grow old without regrets and disappointments, but instead with a feeling of serene wisdom and harmony with oneself and one's surroundings.

Following is a 1993 interview with a Moscow woman who at the time was 96 years old. During World War I she was in her teens. When the Russian Revolution broke out, she was 20. She lived through the Russian Civil War and World War II. Many of her relatives were persecuted or even killed. This seems ancient history to many of us, but this woman, Elena Alexandrovna Strunnikova, is not fiction.

She lives in Moscow on Suvorovski Boulevard, in a big communal flat. Her sight is poor, so she can barely read. It becomes more and more difficult for her to leave home. But her friends are constantly visiting her; some of them are 50 or even 70 years younger than she is. And the only reason why so many people are attracted to her is that she is a person of great inner beauty, wisdom and love. She grew into such a person in spite of the difficulties that she had to overcome throughout her life.

Let us read the life story of this very elderly person. And let's not forget that sometimes, even behind the simplest words, there are years of suffering unimaginable to most of us. What will we be able to share about our own lives when we are 90 years old?

Elena Alexandrovna Strunnikova

I was born in 1897 in Moscow, in Sheryemetiev Street, not far from where I live now. My father was a doctor, and my mother took care of four children, two boys and two girls. My father was a very kind person and he considered his children to be the best. Mother was also kind, but stricter with us. She wanted to educate us so that we would become honest, kind, and hard-working people.

My sister became a teacher, married a Danish man and moved to Denmark. One of my brothers became a doctor of Western literature. In 1937, he was shot. My second brother also was a doctor of science. His specialty was ancient Roman and Greek literature. He lived a long life, and died at the age of 88.

What about myself? As a young woman, I studied at a private school for girls. When I was in the eleventh grade, the World War began. By that time — when I was 11 — my father had died from tuberculosis. After school I finished nursing courses and began working in hospitals, taking care of those who were injured during the war.

Then I entered Moscow University and studied there for several years at the philological faculty — studying Russian literature. Unfortunately, I couldn't finish the course because I got sick; the doctors found the beginning of tuberculosis. Also I needed to earn money.

At the beginning of the revolution I was very enthusiastic. It seemed to me that we were creating a new world. I was so young and naive! But soon, when the first arrests began, I understood what was really going on.

When I was 25, I met a young man whom I married. We loved each other deeply. I was very happy with my husband. But during World War II he died from dystrophy. It was very difficult. He was suffering terribly before his death. I was with him till the last moment.

Within two years I met another man whom I had known during my youth. By then he had already spent eight years in one of Stalin's prisons, and was now exiled to the North. I sold all I had, left everything behind, and followed him. He became my second husband. By that time his health was already declining. We lived together in a small village in the North for five years, and then he also died. I found myself absolutely alone, in the middle of nowhere. But even there I met wonderful people who really helped me.

At that time an old friend of mine — N.V. Polenova, daughter of the famous Russian artist V.P. Polenov — invited me to come to Polenovo to work in the museum as a guide. I had known this family from the age of 7. We were distant relatives and very good friends. I remember how we often spent time together with the Polenov and Mamontov families when we visited Abramtsevo. What a wonderful, high-spirited atmosphere we had in those times together! So, I moved to Polenovo and worked there for another 30 years.

Now I am 96. All my close friends and relatives have already died. I am the only one still alive, and I worry about the lives of those I see around me. My heart is aching. Some people say that it's time to stop worrying, it's not healthy at my age. But I think that as long as I am concerned about others, I am still alive. When I came to work in Polenovo, my private life was over. My heart and my body began to age. But this container, my body, is still so strong — the spirit cannot jump out of it. All day I am sitting and thinking. Thinking, remembering, and thinking again. These are the best words from the Gospels, my mom used to repeat to me — "Don't judge, and you won't face judgment."



Interview Questions:

What has been most important to you in your life?

Love for people, friendship, human relationships. From my childhood I had many friends, with very different views of life. It's very important. I didn't have that many prejudices against people.

What personal quality has helped you the most through difficulties in your life?

I had a calm outlook on life. I have always tried to see the good side in everything. I've always had a strong faith in people. Even when I met a stranger, I always believed in that person. That's what I did earlier, that's what I try to practice now. I want to find something good in everyone.

What are the qualities you have most admired and respected in people?

There is a French proverb: "Death, it's not for long, but stupidity is forever." I've always respected and admired a strong mind and a kind soul. What does it mean — kind soul? It's a big heart. I cannot say, I cannot express this in words. Most of all, I appreciate a big heart.



What made your personal relationships closer?

I've always tried not to judge people, and help them in whatever way I could. My first husband was not an atheist, he was simply indifferent to the questions of faith, whereas I have always been a believer. He used to tell me: "Be kind to people, help them. This will be your faith."

What is your biggest accomplishment, what was most valuable for you?

I was very happy in my private life. My first husband and I — we really loved each other. After we got married, we never parted. And during the war, he died in my arms.

What was your biggest difficulty in life?

That I know for sure. Mathematics.

What do you regret?

I regret that I often hurt my mother, even though I really adored her. Often I didn't tell her the truth. I brought many heavy moments into her life.

And now I regret that I outlived all of my relatives and old friends. Earlier, I could interest other people, and now — what can I give? Only the warmth of my heart, some warmth through relationship. I love people. And I would like to give them my warmth as long as I can.

Life is simple. What we give out, we get back.

For Your Journal



In your journal write down all the things you *could have done* but have not. After you have written the first list, make a second list opposite the first that explains why.

Write a letter to someone with whom you have a disagreement, or someone with whom you have not talked for a long time. Tell that person what you really think about your relationship, and the good things you see in that person. You may want to begin by making a list of the good qualities of that person. Remember, even the most difficult people have at least one good quality.

A Hero of Our Time

by Mikhail Lermontov

Pechorin, before the duel with Grushnitsky:

I recollect all my past and ask myself: Why did I live? What was I born for? There must have been a purpose, and a high one. For I feel in my soul unlimited power. ... But I did not guess this purpose, I was carried away by temptations of empty and ungrateful passions; after that I became as hard as nails, but lost forever the fire of noble desires, the best bloom of life. Since then how often have I played the part of an ax in fate's hands! As an execution tool, I fell upon the heads of the doomed victims, often without malice, always without regret. ... My love brought happiness to nobody, because I never sacrificed for those I loved; I loved for myself, for my own pleasure; I only satisfied a strange need of the heart, devouring greedily their feelings, their tenderness, their joys and sufferings, always insatiable. Likewise a hungry one falls asleep exhausted, and dreams of fine dishes and sparkling wines; he devours in delight the ephemeral gifts of imagination and seems to be relieved; but as soon as he wakes up, the dream vanishes and the hunger and frustration are doubled!

And maybe I'll die tomorrow!
There won't be a single being left who has understood me perfectly. Some think me better than I am, others worse. ... Some will say: he was a good man; others: he was a scoundrel. Both won't be true. After this, is it worthwhile living? But you are living all the same — out of curiosity; waiting and waiting for something new. ... What a ridiculous nuisance!



CHAPTER 15

Beauty Will Save the World

"Beauty will save the world."

Perhaps you have heard this pronouncement of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's. What do you think the writer meant by it?

When speaking about beauty, perhaps most of us would immediately remember some example of the arts — music, literature, or a painting. Why do we value art so highly? Why is it that the pictures by Renaissance artists never seem to age, but on the contrary seem more and more beautiful? Millions of tourists who visit Paris go to the Louvre to see the "Mona Lisa" by Leonardo da Vinci, and the inexplicable beauty of the church on the Nerli River magically attracts anybody who loves Russia. What is the mystery behind the power of beauty?

In China 2,000 years ago Confucius said that the purpose of art is to "guide people's hearts toward righteousness." This understanding of the role of the arts in the harmony of society is one of the basic teachings of Confucianism, a philosophy that influenced the development of a whole civilization.

Perhaps this will help us to think more deeply about beauty and the role of art — its place not only in our own lives but the way it is able to play a part in the transformation of the world.

Everything desires beauty

Toward what are our senses directed? What do our eyes long to see, our ears to hear, our noses to smell, and our fingers to touch?

Would you prefer listening to the musicians of the Bolshoi Theatre tune their instruments or perform the music of Bach? When you are studying, do you like calm music or the sound of road construction outside your window?

Would you like to live in a room where the walls are gray with dirty streaks (the remaining traces of the flood caused by the neighbor upstairs), with your only window facing the city dump? Or would you prefer a well-lit room with a large window opening onto a garden?

Which kind of smells would you prefer — meat kept for a couple of weeks out of the refrigerator in summer, or a cake just baked by your mother?



There is hardly any disagreement over these questions. Have you ever wondered why people always desire beauty, be it in music, good cooking or their surroundings? Of course, beauty is in the eye of the beholder and so people's ideas of beauty vary, but the desire for beauty is constant. For example, elderly people may like Romantic music whereas young people prefer rock. But both will argue that their music is beautiful.

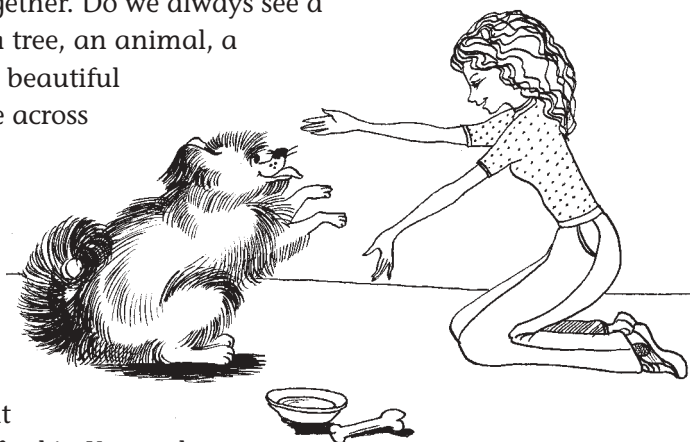
What is beauty?

Before getting into more complicated questions, let us try to think what beauty is. Why do we see some people, things, and events as beautiful and others as ugly?

Many philosophers have tried to answer this question, and often their answers are hard to grasp. Try, for example, to understand Immanuel Kant's definition: "To feel beauty means to evaluate the subjective purpose of an object by means of emotions of pleasure and displeasure."

The definition of Vladimir Soloviev may tell us more: "Goodness, truth and beauty are nothing but different images of love." Beauty is one of the faces of love. What does that mean?

Let us think about this together. Do we always see a particular object — a house, a tree, an animal, a person — in the same way, as beautiful or as ugly? Imagine you come across in the street a lean, dirty dog which tries to bite everyone it sees. You will hardly consider it beautiful. And now imagine you have picked up such a dog, brought it home and raised it. You take it to the vet, cure it of diseases, walk with it, and feed it. You end up loving it, and what was before a plain dog has



become your best friend. Now how will you react if someone tries to call your dog ugly?

This simple example illustrates a very important principle. Beauty is not an objective quality; it manifests itself in relationships. Whether you give somebody your heart or just look positively at the surrounding world, you will notice how beautiful everything is. Love returns to us as beauty.

In the same way, if you bump into a stranger on a bus, his appearance may seem unattractive to you. But if you get acquainted and become attached to each other, the same features will look different. You will see a special beauty and charm in them that you had not noticed at first.

On the other hand, hate and anger distort even the most beautiful face. That is why the notion of a "beautiful person" means much more than just a pretty face. Have you noticed that a person with ideally regular features may be not only unattractive, but even repellent if he is cold, haughty, or has some other unpleasant trait? In the same way, a person possessing no external beauty may be the heart of any company, radiating an inner charm that no one can resist. People sometimes confuse beauty and its empty twin, prettiness. But, as the Russian connoisseur Konstantin Stanislavsky once said, "The difference between beauty and prettiness is the same as between real and paper flowers."

Even an ugly thing seems beautiful to a loving heart.

— Theocritus
ancient Greek poet

No outer beauty can be complete if it is not illuminated by inner beauty.

— Victor Hugo
19th century French writer

The ingredients of beauty

Why does love awaken beauty in the beloved? One of the answers is that love makes the inner potential of the *uniqueness* of all things manifest itself.

You have probably heard of the flower called edelweiss. Songs and poems praising the beauty of edelweiss have been written.

What do you imagine it is like? In fact, it is a small, obscure flower resembling a primrose, and bears no resemblance to a rose or tulip. Why do people speak about its beauty? The answer is simple. Edelweiss grows high in the mountains where there are no other flowers. Its uniqueness makes it appear beautiful.

The same is true of people. Our beauty is rooted in our uniqueness. However, it is not necessary to be the only person within ten miles for your beauty to be noticeable. Unlike flowers, each of us possesses a personality that is unique even in a crowd of many thousands. Through love, our uniqueness is revealed as amazing beauty.

Another ingredient of beauty is inner harmony. Imagine the starry sky on a clear night. No one will deny its awe-inspiring beauty. Or the rising of the sun. Why do we find such scenes beautiful? In them we feel inner harmony, an affirmation of positive meaning of the world about us. For stars are not just pieces of matter scattered randomly about the universe; they are part of a single system that exists according to majestic laws. The infinite variety of colors during a sunset is not accidental, either. Subconsciously we experience this order and harmony as a manifestation of beauty.

From a letter of Ludwig van Beethoven:

Surrounded by nature's beauty, often I sit for hours, while my senses feast upon the spectacles of nature. Here the majestic sun is not concealed ... here the blue sky is my sublime roof. When in the evening I contemplate in wonder the sky and the host of luminous bodies continually revolving within their orbits, suns or earths by name, then my spirit rises beyond these constellations so many millions of miles away.

In order to appreciate beauty, we must be in a state of inner harmony ourselves. Imagine you have come across something extremely unpleasant, and you are feeling fear, anger, hate or disgust. Do you think that in such a state you will be able to appreciate a beautiful picture or the song of a nightingale? It is hardly likely. Most probably you will have only one strong desire — to run away or to express your feelings to someone. Only after having calmed down will you be able to appreciate beauty again. Thus, not only is beauty a visible expression of certain universal laws, but to perceive it we ourselves must be in a state of inner harmony.

When we talk about the connection between “harmony” and “beauty,” we need to remember that this inner, deeper harmony manifests itself in different ways, including those that may seem unattractive. For example, which is more beautiful — a black, hairy caterpillar or a big, bright butterfly; a field covered with thick snow or a meadow filled with colorful flowers?

If we don't know the meaning of the changes taking place in nature, a caterpillar may look ugly, and a snow-covered field may seem cold and lifeless. But when we feel the grandeur and exquisiteness of the whole scheme, we will understand every manifestation of it as beautiful. Spring, summer, autumn, winter — each has its own special beauty. Part of this beauty is in the interconnectedness of everything. If there were no “nasty” caterpillar, there would be no gorgeous butterfly.

In this sense, nature can teach us many things. Every moment of our lives also possesses a unique beauty, but we often don't notice, seeing no meaning in what is happening to us. Nevertheless, we have the potential to look at our lives in a new way, from the standpoint of love, and then beauty will be visible even where earlier we could have seen nothing but darkness and despair.

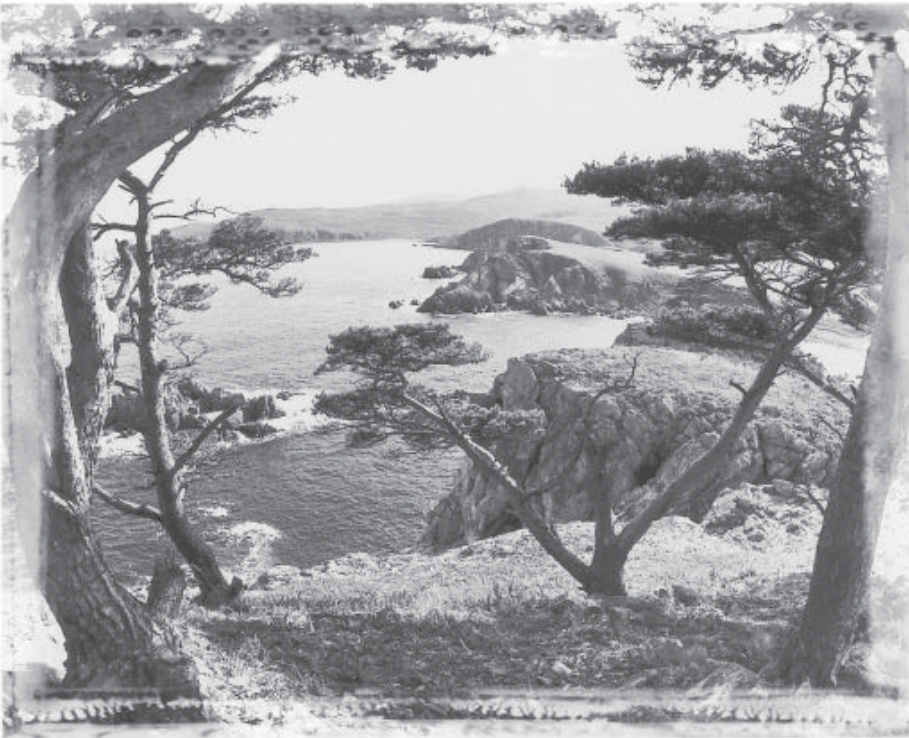
How does beauty begin?

Let us try once more to understand how beauty appears. We have already noted that the perception of deep beauty results from relationships based on the impulse of love. This can be understood in case of creating something new, such as a work of art, but also in looking at what already exists.

For instance, to feel the deepest beauty of a flower, we can first choose to look at it with loving eyes — or at least with an inner peace, which means an unconscious

radiating of the same quality of emotion. The flower seems to be more beautiful. But if we look at the same flower with disdain, it will appear in quite a different way. We will notice that some of its petals have already faded, and we may shudder at the presence of a busy insect in its center.

The perception and experience of beauty are rooted in the emotions. If we choose to look with love, our perception of beauty will be sharper. Everyone knows that when a person is in love, he sees everything “through rose-colored glasses.” The whole world seems beautiful. Everyone seems to be good and kind, the sun shines



brighter than usual, and the birds sing especially sweetly.

Skeptics may ask: What is the point of it? Such a perception of reality is nothing but an illusion, as insubstantial as a soap bubble. But there is a wise saying: The world exists because of loving people. In choosing to notice and focus on the beautiful dimension of life, we are not deceiving ourselves. Rather we are helping the world to look at itself in a different way and notice what value lies in life's smallest details. Once we see this dimension, we will have no wish to return to the limited ugly world we used to perceive.

Why does humanity strive for beauty?

For whom do flowers bloom in their beauty, which is most often invisible to human eyes? For what did the birds decorate themselves with bright colors like living flowers? For whom did the lark and the nightingale make their songs? Why are the tiger and the leopard so beautiful in their dangerous grace, and the lion in its majesty? For what does the maidens' beauty bloom?

In the beauty of nature, as well as in works of art, there is a partial or a preliminary transformation of the world, and this beauty lifts man to the world of eternal images or ideas, the palpitating horses elevate the true driver to the life-giving sun.

— S.N. Bulgakov
20th century Russian religious philosopher

Before answering the question of why humanity strives for beauty, let us perform a simple experiment. You will need two evenings for it. On the first go to see a beautiful movie, one in which the way conflicts are resolved inspires the viewer's "perception of deep beauty." As happens in real life, ordinary people as well as heroes face problems, but the question is how they overcome their problems — by harming or

killing enemies or by clever and wise means? After the film is finished, observe yourself. How do you feel? What did you dream of that night? What kind of mood are you in?

Next evening go to see another movie — a horror film. Faces distorted by hate and anger, a nauseating feeling of fear and disgust aroused by the characters, floods of blood and the suffering of innocent victims. Again try to observe yourself. What feelings has the film aroused in you? Do you feel calm and at peace, or do you feel the need to discharge the accumulated excitement and stress?

Even such a simple experiment will demonstrate why people tend to strive for beauty and not for ugliness. If we saw only ugliness around us, we would become the embodiment of that ugliness ourselves, and this would lead to hate, alienation and pain. We would lose our inner peace.

What does beauty mean to our life? First of all, pursuing a beautiful path of life can be likened to pursuing the best way of

expressing ourselves. Following the truth of the beautiful should lead us to find the purest aspects of our personality and harmony in our soul. This, in turn, is a step toward experiencing mutual understanding with others and oneness with the world. We can feel a part of the eternal, beautiful scheme by overcoming the darkness of solitude in which our soul suffers. All of us strive for love, and love and beauty are inseparable.

Man as the creator of beauty

We are part of the harmony of the universe. Through creative efforts we multiply beauty, especially if we are guided by love. Unfortunately, we know examples of people guided by nothing but a desire to change the world. Some of these people became not the creators but the destroyers of beauty. Take, for instance, the immense project of re-routing the Siberian rivers or the attempt to destroy all of Russia's religious architecture, replacing it with modern buildings. Probably there is not a single

city on the territory of the former USSR that has not suffered from such projects.

But a person guided by love becomes a real creator of beauty. Painting, poetry, sculpture, music — all the kinds of art are finally directed at one aim — creating beauty. Leonardo da Vinci's paintings, Michelangelo's sculptures, Mozart's music and Shakespeare's poetry can touch the heart of any person, regardless of his

We look to perceive and to create beauty because our heart is stirred to love that which is beautiful. ... It struck me that my fascination with art was its beauty and thus its ability to bring joy and consolation to a world filled with suffering. Now I realized that I had to make my life beautiful through truly ethical action, and thus be a joy and comfort to others.

— Norman Vincent Peale
American Christian minister and author,
The Power of Positive Thinking



nationality or the time in which he lives. The reason is that art can reflect the eternal values contained in the human heart.

Although nature resembles us, there is a quality of human creativity that is not reflected in nature.

Even if you search the whole universe, you will not find another being with the ability to make something totally distinct, new, unique, with eternal value. When a beaver makes a dam or a bird a nest, it does it in the same way that its ancestors have done for thousands of years.

It repeats the same actions as all its fellow

beavers or birds. However, human creativity is constantly reaching new levels of expression and complexity.



A spontaneous movement of the soul engenders art. The artist wants to create his own world and cultivate it in his soul, uniting his inner feeling and vision with the reality of the world outside him.

The way a person sees himself, eternity and nature influences how he constructs his home, temple, pictures, and even utensils.

Painters and artists of other genres:
You bring the treasure of your hearts to people, you share with them. Your aim is the spiritual unification of people, love between people.

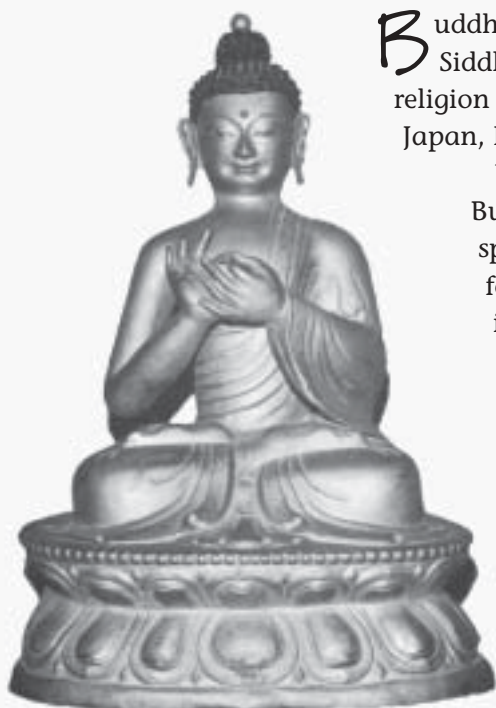
As long as we breathe, we must create! And your creative work may be manifold; the main thing here is the creation of one's spirit. It is the eternal creative work. The things you paint on the canvas, veneer, board, are nothing but a sign of what has happened in your soul.

— Alexander Men

Russian priest, Faith and Creative Work

CHAPTER 16

Buddhism: The Life of Buddha



Buddhism is one of the world's major paths of faith. Founded by Siddhartha Gautama in India, it became at different times the leading religion in every country of the Far East and shaped the cultures of China, Japan, Korea, Thailand and Mongolia.

Buddhism is sometimes described as an “atheistic religion,” because Buddha did not talk about God but was mainly concerned with spiritual growth and the fulfillment of human potential. Unlike the founders of Christianity and Islam, he did not claim that his teaching was revealed to him by God. Nevertheless, the moral code and values that Buddha discovered and understood are very similar to those of religions that affirm the existence of God.

Childhood

The founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama, was born in 563 BC, the son of an elected king of a small realm in Nepal, at the foothills of the snow-clad Himalayas. His father named him Siddhartha, meaning “one who accomplishes his objectives in life.” His followers hailed him as the *Buddha* or Enlightened One.

Buddha's father summoned fortune-tellers at his birth in order to receive insight about the boy's future. The fortune-tellers foretold of Buddha's greatness. They all agreed that he was no ordinary child. His career path, however, appeared ambiguous. If he remained in his worldly position, he would unify India and become a great conqueror, a Universal King. On the other hand, if he forsook the world, he would become not a king but a world redeemer.

They told Gautama's father that as soon as his son encountered old age, sickness and death, he would abandon the household. The king took every precaution to keep the boy in seclusion amid the luxuries of the palace. No effort was spared to keep the prince's mind attached to his royal life. Specifically, the prince was to be shielded from contact with sickness, decrepitude, and death. Even when he went riding, runners went ahead to clear the roads of potentially disturbing sights.

By the standards of his day, Gautama's upbringing was luxurious. Living at various seasons of the year in three palaces, he was dressed in the most expensive clothes, fed the choicest delicacies and served by lovely female minstrels. As a prince, he received the best education in classical Indian literature. As a member of the warrior caste, he also learned the physical arts of a gentleman: how to ride a horse, mount an elephant, drive a chariot and lead an army. He was also blessed with a handsome appearance, for there are numerous references in Buddhism to “the

perfection of his visible body.” At 16, he married a princess from a neighboring kingdom; she was named Yasodhara, and she bore him a son they called Rahala.

In spite of the ease and delights of palace life, Gautama became dissatisfied with worldly ambitions and sensual pleasures. He was gifted with a sensitive soul. Unbridled indulgence had gradually transformed a monarch’s heir and warrior prince into an apostle of limitless compassion.

The four signs

It was only when he was 29 years old that Gautama really began to think about the meaning of life. During excursions with his charioteer Channa, he saw four sights that changed his life. One day, Gautama happened to encounter an old man, decrepit, broken-toothed, gray-haired, crooked and bent of body, leaning on a staff and trembling. Gautama was shocked by the reality of old age and realized that although he was now young and strong, he would also grow old. On another occasion, while touring a pleasure park, he saw a man who was desperately sick. Gautama was again distressed and taken aback by the misery of human existence. On a third occasion, he came across a funeral procession and realized that all persons must die. When he finally encountered a shaven-headed monk wearing the robe of an ascetic order, he learned the possibility of withdrawal from the world.

Once Gautama had recognized the inevitability of bodily pain and death, he could not return to fleshly pleasure. The singing of the dancing girls, the lilt of the lutes and cymbals, the sumptuous feasts and processions only mocked his brooding mind. Flowers nodding in the sunshine and snows melting on the Himalayas cried louder of the transient quality of worldly things. He determined to quit the distractions of the palace and follow the call of a truth-seeker. When he told this to his parents, they were shocked and would not give him permission to leave the palace. The young prince said to his father:

Father, if you can give me permanent freedom from the sufferings of birth, sickness, aging, and death, I will stay in the palace; but if you cannot, I must leave and make my human life truly meaningful.

The young prince’s determination to leave the palace and enter a life of meditation could not be shaken. On the same night that his wife bore him a son, he secretly stole away, left his young family, and rode off into the forest in search of enlightenment.

Gautama became a wandering ascetic without possessions. He tore off his clothes, shaved his head, slept on a bed of thorn branches and denied himself food. He sought out two of the foremost Hindu masters of the day to inherit from them the wisdom of their vast tradition, including meditation. He learned a great deal about Hindu philosophy and meditation. In time he concluded that he had learned all they had to teach him, but he still had not found the complete liberation he was looking for.

He then joined a band of extreme ascetics who believed that harsh treatment of the body would lead to liberation of the soul. For the next six years he tried every material deprivation imaginable. He wore rough, uncomfortable garments. He spent long periods in uncomfortable stances without moving. He pulled out his hair and beard. He alternately lived in wild animal-infested forests, snow, deserts or in total solitude. He tried to stop or slow down his breathing, ate excrement and fasted, and finally stopped eating altogether. He ate so little — one bean a day during one of his fasts — that one day he commented, “When I thought I would touch the skin of my stomach, I actually took hold of my spine.”

A person of enormous willpower, he outdid all the other ascetics in every austerity. Despite the fact that he had disciplined his physical senses, practiced great self-control, conquered his emotions and controlled his thoughts, the former prince felt

that the ascetic life had not brought him closer to obtaining the truth. In near exhaustion from his final fast, he accepted a meal of milk rice, renounced his ascetic life and decided to concentrate on meditation. His ascetic companions left him in disgust at what they saw as his weakness.

However, this experiment provided the first plank of Gautama's philosophy, the principle of the *Middle Way* between the extremes of indulgence and self-torture. People need some things to keep warm, clean, and well fed, but a life pursuing the satisfaction of these desires alone will not provide permanent happiness. After one has eaten one's fill, eating more does not make one happier. People do not achieve lasting happiness merely by collecting possessions and satisfying their physical desires. Physical desires are quickly sated, although greed itself is not. On the other hand, renouncing our desires does not bring happiness either. Therefore, self-control is good, but pointless suffering is not; helping others and working to improve the world as well as yourself is also good, and total solitude is not necessary. Also through this experience, Gautama found that human beings are affected by their physical sufferings, and that a human is not a soul imprisoned in a body but a being of both mind and body.

The enlightenment

After eating his meal of milk rice, Gautama slept and that same night had five dreams. After the dreams he rose, sat under a tree and started to meditate, determined not to move until he had obtained enlightenment. It is said that as he sat in meditation, Mara, the chief of demons, tried to tempt him and stop him from reaching his goal. Mara tried to frighten him with terrifying demons and distract him with beautiful women. However, Gautama resisted all these temptations by developing even deeper concentration. That night, Gautama experienced enlightenment. His thinking became very calm and detached, and he was filled with joy. Soon the thinking faded away, leaving joy and rapture. Eventually even the joy dissipated, leaving his mind peaceful, tranquil and clear — a sharp tool ready to penetrate to the heart of reality. With his mind prepared in this way, Gautama gained insight into the nature of human existence and realized his goal of experiencing perfect peace. The state of *nirvana* which he attained cannot be described in words. For 49 days he sat lost in rapture and in complete bliss under the tree his followers later called the Bo (enlightenment) Tree.

I have conquered all; I know all, and my life is pure.
I have left all, and I am free from craving.
I myself found the way.
Whom shall I call Teacher?
Whom shall I teach?

Gautama had become a Buddha — one who has found the truth himself without reliance on any guru (teacher).

After experiencing enlightenment, Buddha was tempted by Mara one more time. He told him that no one would understand the profound truth he had discovered, so why bother to try to teach anyone? Why not just be done with the world, leave his body and slip away into *nirvana*? But Buddha decided that he would dedicate the rest of his life to saving others.

Teaching ministry

Buddha sought out his former ascetic colleagues and preached to them his first sermon, known as the Deer Park Sermon. In it he explained to them the *Four Noble Truths* (which we shall look at in the next chapter), and they became his first dis-



Gautama will become a great king.

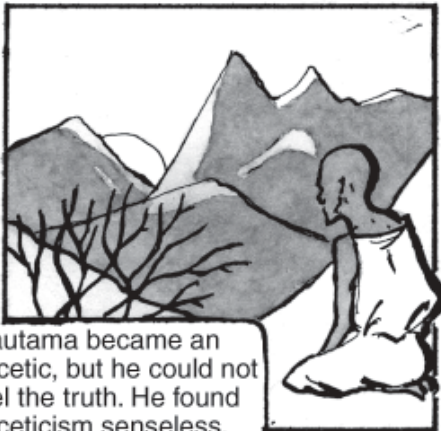
But if he ever comes upon death, sickness or old age, he will go away from this world and he will become a great thinker.



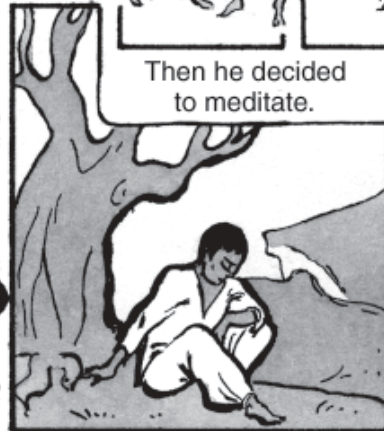
Gautama grew up, got married. The king hid the reality of life from his son.



Gautama became an ascetic, but he could not feel the truth. He found asceticism senseless.

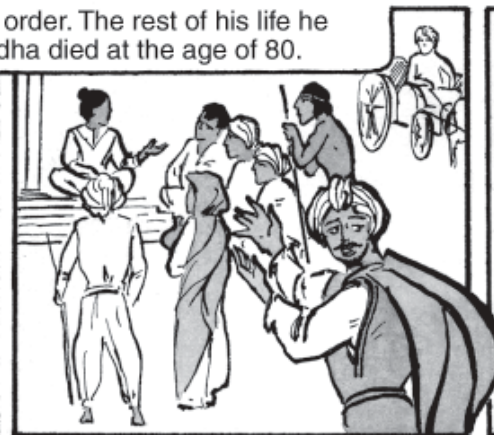
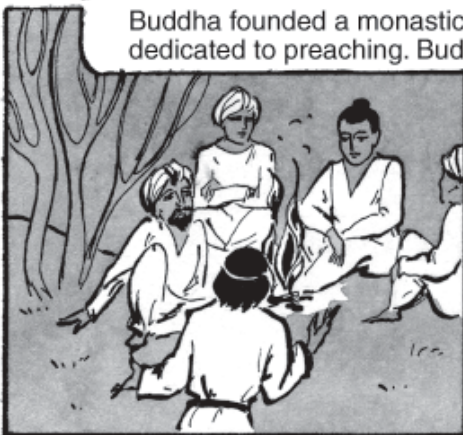


Then he decided to meditate.



At last one evening he suddenly attained enlightenment.

Buddha founded a monastic order. The rest of his life he dedicated to preaching. Buddha died at the age of 80.



ciples. Buddha devoted the remaining 45 years of his life to sharing the ego-shattering and life-redeeming message. His teaching was very radical and challenged the establishment of his day. He taught in the vernacular of the people instead of the Sanskrit of the Hindu scriptures. He rejected the monopolistic grip of the Brahmins (Hindu teachers) on religious knowledge by challenging every individual to do his own religious seeking:

Do not accept what you hear by report, do not accept tradition, do not accept a statement because it is found in your books, nor because it is in accord with your belief, nor because it is the saying of your teacher. Be ye lamps unto yourselves. Those who, either now or after I am dead, shall rely upon themselves only and not look for assistance to anyone besides themselves, it is they who shall reach the topmost height.

Buddha also ridiculed the meticulous observance of ancient rituals, which he thought were irrelevant to the hard, practical job of overcoming self-centered desire. He ignored speculation concerning the nature of God and the soul because it was distraction and did not help a person to reach nirvana. He also rejected reliance on miracles for salvation. People who sought them were looking for shortcuts that did not exist instead of working out their own salvation. Attacking the fatalism he found in his own day, Buddha challenged every person to make his own effort that was necessary for enlightenment. These challenges to the status quo aroused considerable controversy. Buddha was regarded by Hindus as a great heretic, and for centuries Hindus opposed Buddhism.

Despite the stringent caste system, Buddha taught everyone who was interested. The Buddhist community or *sangha* was made up of four categories: monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. His own family, including his father, became his followers. He often used parables in his teaching such as the famous one of the blind men and the elephant. Many incidents from his life became instructional stories in their own right, such as the story of Kisagotami (following page).

Many people were attracted to him by his calm, warm personality and the simplicity and depth of his teaching. By the time he died, he had a following of hundreds if not thousands of enlightened people.

Death

At the age of 80, Buddha died in an obscure little town where he had come to spread his message. At the house of his friend Cunda, a blacksmith, he became ill after eating a meal. Despite great pain, he remained calm. It occurred to him that Cunda might feel responsible for his death. His last command was that his companions tell Cunda that of all the meals eaten during his life only two stood out as exceptional blessings. One was the meal whose strength had enabled him to attain enlightenment under the Bo Tree; the other was the one that opened to him the final gates to nirvana.

Gautama Buddha taught that in the future another Buddha would come to help men set up an ideal kingdom of righteousness and peace. This coming Buddha is called Maitreya (love). He would be a different person from Gautama but would have the same mission, and he would have far greater success.

Initially Buddhism spread very rapidly in India and beyond. Its teaching was of universal application, and it was very practical and flexible in its guidance. By the 12th century Buddhism declined in India, but it grew to become a major religion in Sri Lanka, China, Tibet, Korea, Japan and throughout Southeast Asia.

The Story of Kisagotami

During one of his travels Buddha met an old woman called Kisagotami. He listened as she cried about the miseries of her life. She asked the Buddha for help. He explained to her that her life was no different from anyone else's life: All life is suffering. The only way for her to escape her suffering was to enter into a state of nirvana. She must "blow out" the flame of her desires and cravings.

The woman would not listen; she could not escape from these desires or forget her suffering. Buddha told her that if she would bring him a mustard seed from a house that had never known sorrow or trouble, he would use it to banish all her miseries.

Delighted with this promise, the woman began her search and Buddha went on his way. Much later he returned to find the woman singing to herself as she washed clothes by the riverside.

Since Buddha had a "spiritual eye," he could already see what had happened to the woman. Nevertheless, he asked if she had found the house that had never known suffering or trouble. "No," the woman replied, "every house I visited had far more trouble than my house."

"Will you keep searching?" the Buddha asked.

"Later I will search," the woman said. "Right now, I must stop and help these people. They are far less fortunate than I am."

"Then you do not need the mustard seed," Buddha told her. "You are on the road to becoming a Buddha yourself."



Something to think about



- What was the most important thing missing in Gautama's life, for which he gave up everything to search?
- Why did the realization of the existence of death and suffering make such an impact on his life?
- What do you think his parents and family thought about his choices in life?
- What does "Be ye lamps unto yourselves" mean?

For Your Journal



Imagine yourself sitting beneath the Bo Tree. Which temptations would you find most difficult to resist? Write about the struggle you would have to overcome them.

CHAPTER 17

The Teachings of Buddhism

The message of Buddha is known as the *Dharma*, which literally means “the law.” It is also the name Buddhists give to their religion. Exactly what Buddha said is a

matter of some controversy, since there are a vast number of scriptures claiming to be the word of the Buddha. However, his first teachings, the *Four Noble Truths* and *The Eightfold Path*, are the basis for all the other 84,000 teachings of Buddha. Buddhism later split into several different branches, which elaborated and developed different aspects of Buddha’s teaching. Buddha himself recognized that it was important for each person to recognize the limitations of his own faith and to respect the faith of others:

A man has a faith. If he says, “This is my faith,” so far he maintains truth. But by that he cannot proceed to the absolute conclusion: “This alone is Truth, and everything else is false.”



Karma

All Far Eastern religions recognize that moral law exists in the universe. In Hinduism and Buddhism this is called *Karma*, a Sanskrit term meaning “action.” Any action — bodily, verbal or mental — is karma. Good actions create good karma, and bad actions create bad karma. This karma affects a person’s future. Our present state creates the future, but our past has already created the present. Thus, present afflictions are regarded by Buddhists as the settlement of outstanding debts for bad actions committed either in this life or in a previous life.

Buddhists believe in reincarnation, a doctrine from Hinduism affirming that after death, a person is reborn as another person for the purpose of pursuing greater enlightenment and liberation from ignorance and bad desires. The goal of human life is nirvana. This perfect state is characterized by freedom from uncontrolled desire. Since this cannot or has not been achieved in a single life, people are reincarnated. Buddhists and Hindus believe that we have had many previous lives. Their life task is to be liberated from the endless cycle of rebirth called *samsara* by entering nirvana.

Thus, who you are in this lifetime is a result of your karma from previous lives.

The first two verses of the favorite Buddhist text, the *Dhammapada*, summarize the essence of karma and outline the path of perfection:

If a man speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows him as the wheel of the cart follows the beast that draws the cart.

If a man speaks or acts with a pure mind, joy follows him as his own shadow.

In his *Introduction to Buddhism*, Tibetan Buddhist spiritual guide Geshe Kelsang Gyatso vividly describes the impact of our actions on our path of life:

Every action we perform leaves an imprint on our mind, and each imprint eventually gives rise to its own effect. Our mind is like a field, and performing actions is like sowing seeds in that field. Virtuous actions sow seeds of future happiness and non-virtuous actions sow seeds of future suffering. These seeds remain dormant in our mind until the conditions for them to ripen occur, and then they produce their effect.

It is pointless and a futile distraction to blame others for our problems since:

By oneself the evil is done, and it is oneself who suffers; by oneself the evil is not done, and by oneself one becomes pure. The pure and the impure come from oneself: No man can purify another.

— Dhammapada 165

The problem is, as the Buddha points out:

It is easy to do what is wrong, to do what is bad for oneself; but very difficult to do what is right, to do what is good for oneself.

— Dhammapada 163

When talking to ordinary people, Buddha laid great stress on karma, the fear of a bad rebirth, and the hope for a good rebirth. He told people how to prepare for a better rebirth by living a moral and responsible life. Pleasures derived from transient material goods should be avoided, and unselfish kindness should be bestowed upon all. Bad karma has a twofold effect — you will be miserable in this life as you lose friends or suffer from guilt, and you will be reborn in some miserable condition. The Buddhist scriptures contain frightening pictures of the sufferings of hell and life as a miserable ghost. Good karma leads to peace, calm, untroubled sleep, loving friends and good health in this life, and a good rebirth after death — perhaps a sojourn in one of the heavens where life is like paradise.

Although the Buddha's teaching can be very hard to understand, people were attracted to him because of his simple and practical teaching methods. For example:

Remember there are six main ways of wasting time and money. Drinking, wandering the streets late at night, going to fairs and festivals, gambling, mixing with a bad crowd and being lazy.

There are six reasons why drinking is bad. It wastes money, it leads to quarrels and fights, makes you ill, gives you a bad reputation, leads you to do immoral things you would regret and weakens the brain.

There are six reasons why roaming the streets late at night is bad. You are most likely to be mugged, your family is at home without your protection, your property is more likely to be burgled, you will be suspected of crimes by the police, rumors about you will be believed and you will be exposed to all sorts of trouble.

Going to fairs and festivals means you will spend your time thinking about music, instruments, dancing and all the other entertainments and forget the important things.

Gambling is bad because if you lose, you lose money; if you win, you make enemies, nobody trusts you, friends despise you and no one will want to be married to you.

Mixing with a bad crowd means your friends are hooligans, drunkards, drug addicts, cheats and criminals and you are bound to be led astray by them.

Being idle is bad because you waste your life getting nothing achieved, no money earned. The idle person can always find an excuse for not working: "it's too hot," "it's too cold," "it's too early," "it's too late," "I'm too hungry," "I'm too full."

Although the moral teachings of Buddhism look more or less the same as those of other faiths, their source or reasoning is different. Buddhism's moral teachings are not derived from commandments from a divine being who requires obedience. Rather, they are guidelines for making spiritual progress and achieving perfection. Therefore, Buddhists try to focus on discovering how moral rules can be applied in a suitable way considering each situation's circumstances. For example, obedience to the principle of telling the truth may on occasion be broken, if the lie is determined to be the most loving and helpful thing to do. Buddhism reminds us to focus on the deepest intentions of our heart when considering a moral decision. Gyatso writes that, "Whether an action is good, bad, or neutral depends principally upon the intention that motivates it. Good actions come from good intentions, bad actions from bad intentions, and neutral actions from neutral intentions."

Whether keeping strictly to moral guidelines or not, the important thing for Buddhists is motivation — whether a person's action springs from selfish or unselfish motives. Spiritual progress is dependent more upon why an action is chosen, not the action in itself. However, because it is easy to be confused about one's real motives for actions, meditation and mental training are required for the mind to be purified.

The Deer Park Sermon

In his first sermon after attaining enlightenment, Buddha revealed to his former colleagues what he had discovered. This is generally regarded as the core of his teaching. However, it has to be remembered that this sermon was given to five ascetic religious specialists who were prepared to understand and receive what he said. As mentioned above, when the Buddha spoke to ordinary people, his teaching was much simpler and down to earth.

In the Deer Park Sermon Buddha compared himself to a doctor whose work consisted of four stages:

1. diagnosing the illness
2. identifying the cause of the illness
3. finding the cure for the illness
4. prescribing the medicine

Buddha told the ascetics that he had found by experience that a pleasure-seeking life and a life of extreme self-mortification were both harmful. The way of life that leads to the most profound insight, peace and enlightenment is a moderate one, the Middle Path. Following this path enabled him to see clearly the Four Noble Truths.



The Four Noble Truths

The first truth

The first truth is that there is something fundamentally wrong with life as most beings experience it. Life is *dukkha*, usually translated as suffering.

Three forms of suffering are distinguished:

Plain, ordinary suffering is what we see in the examples listed above. The more thoughtful and sensitive a person, the more he becomes aware of the suffering that seems to underlie everything, from the natural brutality of animals' preying on each other to the horror of humans' exploitation of other humans.

This is the Noble Truth of Suffering: Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering, association with what is loathed is suffering, separation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering.

— Samyutta Nikaya

The second kind of suffering comes from the impermanence of life. Even beautiful things decay, loved ones die, and sometimes we change so that something that was once a source of pleasure is now boring. This is why even people who outwardly seem to have everything may still be unhappy.

The third form of suffering is more subtle. It is the sense that life is always frustrating, dissatisfying, disharmonious and incomplete. Life has become dislocated in the same way that a bone that has slipped out of its socket causes every movement to be painful. Buddha believed that when a person finally recognizes that all life is *dukkha*, he will want to be released from it.

The second truth

The second truth is that suffering is caused by *tanha*, our craving or selfish desire. We want, want, want — without end. These desires themselves spring from ignorance. The reason why we have such desires is that we are deluded. We think that we will find happiness from external sources.

Buddha identified six main delusions. They are:

1. **Ignorance** — not understanding the nature of cyclic existence and the law of cause and effect.
2. **Greed** — craving the satisfaction of our senses by attaching ourselves to objects and people that we consider beautiful.
3. **Anger** — said to be the greatest barrier to enlightenment because it destroys personal and world peace.
4. **Pride** — feeling superior to others.
5. **Doubt** — questioning belief in cyclic existence and karma so that it becomes an obstacle to enlightenment.
6. **Delusion** — holding on strongly to beliefs that bring suffering to oneself and others.

The third truth

Having identified the cause of our suffering, we can eliminate it and end our own suffering.

Buddha's message encourages us to eliminate craving and ignorance. He attained enlightenment and thus we can too. We can do this by giving

This is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering: It is craving which produces renewal of being, accompanied by relish and greed, seeking its delight now here, now there; in other words craving for sensual experience, craving for eternal life, craving for oblivion.

— S.N.

This is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering: It is the remainderless fading and ceasing, the giving up, relinquishing, letting go and rejecting of that same craving.

— S.N.

up, relinquishing, letting go and rejecting craving and delusions. Lasting happiness is not possible until we are liberated from slavery to desire. We are sad because we long for things we do not have, and thus we become the slaves of these things. The Buddhist name for the state in which all craving, ignorance and suffering have been eliminated is *nirvana*. The word literally means “blown out.”

It is often said that nirvana cannot be described but only experienced; to talk about it is like talking to a blind man

about colors. Through observation of Buddha’s life, however, we can affirm that a person who has attained such a state is still alive, happy, peaceful and energetic. He is never apathetic or bored, always knows the right thing to do, still feels all the pains and pleasures of other human beings but remains impervious to their sway.

The fourth truth: the Eightfold Path

The fourth truth is the practical one, the method by which we can attack craving and ignorance and stop suffering by describing the way of the Middle Path or the *Noble Eightfold Path*. This path leads from selfishness to altruism through discipline and moral training.

The way of life can be summed up as higher training in three areas:

- moral discipline
- concentration
- wisdom

This is the Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering: It is the Noble Eightfold Path which consists of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

— S.N.

Moral discipline is the determination to abandon any wrong action and to pacify the cravings that preoccupy our minds. This makes it easier to concentrate and attain tranquility. When our minds are peaceful, we can overcome ignorance.

1. Right view

Since suffering originates from a mistaken philosophy of life, liberation begins with the highest or most balanced outlook on life. It means accepting Buddha’s analysis of human existence and the four noble truths outlined above.

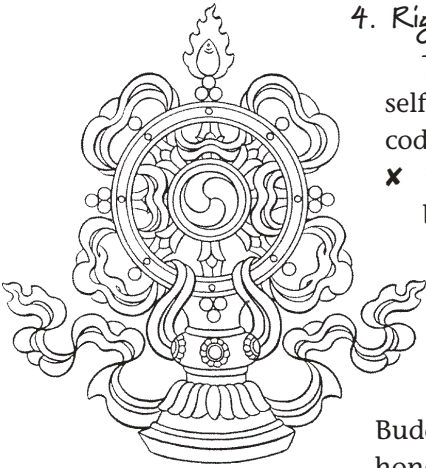
Without accepting this analysis, a person would not bother with the rest of the path.

2. Right intention

We need to have a positive and noble attitude to life, seeing one’s goal in life as enlightenment and unselfish love for all beings. In Buddhist ethics, actions are judged by intention.

3. Right speech

Our speech is a reflection of character and also a means of changing it. Speech provides a common way of either harming or helping others. Wrong speech includes lies, gossip, harsh words and time-wasting chatter. In fact, there are far more opportunities to hurt people through words than actual physical blows. “Right speech” includes helpful advice, teaching, words of consolation, and so on. The Buddha often stressed the value of silence when no useful speech could be made.



4. Right action

The general direction in which our actions should change is toward selflessness and compassion. This is clarified by the *Five Precepts*, the moral code to which all Buddhists should adhere.

- ✕ The first is to abstain from killing, not just humans but any sentient being. This is the reason that most Buddhists are vegetarians.
- ✕ The second is not to take what is not given, because this violates the community of which one is a part.
- ✕ The third is to abstain from sexual misconduct. Buddha regarded sexual desire as the most powerful and difficult to control. Hence, the Buddhist attitude to women: “Is she old? Regard her as your mother. Is she honorable? Regard her as your sister. Is she of small account? Regard her as your younger sister. Is she a child? Treat her reverently and with politeness.”
- ✕ The fourth is to abstain from false speech. A Buddhist is committed to the truth. Lying deceives oneself and others and causes suffering.
- ✕ The fifth is to abstain from alcohol and drugs. A Buddhist tries to develop mental, moral and physical self-control, and drugs and alcohol have the opposite effect.

Besides providing rules about what not to do, Buddhism encourages positive virtues — contentment with a simple life, detachment from material concerns, love and compassion for all beings, and tolerance.

5. Right livelihood

Buddha laid down guidelines for people to work without causing harm to others. A person’s occupation should not make it impossible for him to observe the moral code. For this reason, Buddha advised against work connected with slavery, prostitution, making weapons, and dealing with intoxicants such as drugs and alcohol. People should seek occupations through which they can serve others.

6. Right effort

Spiritual growth starts with being aware of the good and bad aspects of one’s personality. To follow the path, a person must make an effort to prevent new evil from entering the mind, remove all the evil that is there, and nurture the good already within one’s mind.

7. Right mindfulness

“All we are is the result of what we have thought.” For this reason, control of the mind is very important. Thoughts and distractions should not enter the mind in an uncontrolled and random way. That is why Buddhists try to cultivate calm and awareness, especially of one’s own body, sensations, feelings, and thoughts, with the view to having more knowledge and control over them.

8. Right concentration

This is formal meditation, the practice of techniques designed to lead the mind to a state in which it can perceive the truth and attain wisdom.

What is meditation?

Usually we find it difficult to control our mind. It seems as if our mind is like a balloon in the wind — blown here and there by external circumstances. If

things go well, our mind is happy, but if they go badly, it immediately becomes unhappy. For example, if we get what we want, such as a new possession or a new partner, we become excited and cling to them tightly; but since we cannot have everything we want, and since we will inevitably be separated from friends and possessions we currently enjoy, this mental stickiness, or attachment, serves only to cause us pain. On the other hand, if we do not get what we want, or if we lose something that we like, we become despondent or irritated.

Such fluctuations of mood are because we are too closely involved in the external situation. We are like a child making a sand castle who is excited when it is first made, but who becomes upset when it is destroyed by the incoming tide. By training in meditation we create an inner space and clarity that enables us to control our mind regardless of the external circumstances. Gradually we develop mental equilibrium, a balanced mind that is happy all the time, rather than an unbalanced mind that oscillates between the extremes of excitement and despondency.

If we train in meditation systematically, eventually we will be able to eradicate from our mind the delusions that are the cause of all our problems and suffering.

In this way we will experience a permanent inner peace, known as “liberation” or nirvana. Then day or night in life after life we will experience only peace and happiness.

— Geshe Kelsang Gyatso



By meditating, Buddhists believe they can become aware of an inner source of peace. But according to Buddhism, a person cannot limit his life to meditation alone. This path doesn't embrace the whole world, and therefore it is not universal. Truth requires action. It is through meditation that one can understand what kind

of action is needed. So for a true Buddhist, there is no meditation without action, and no action without meditation.

A simple breathing exercise

Close your eyes. When you are still and comfortable, focus your attention on your breath as it enters and leaves your nostrils. Concentrate on the tip of your nose. Feel the coolness as you breathe in and the warmth as you breathe out. If any thoughts come into your head, let them go without following them, like soap bubbles melting in the air. Bring your attention back to your quiet and regular breathing.

CHAPTER 18

The Value of Life

Each of us is a human being. Each of us is alive. What is more precious to us than life?

What is a human being? What determines his value? Does his value consist of the good he does in his own family and toward society?

Of course, it is wonderful to make scientific discoveries and inventions, to create new medicines, to raise happy children, and to serve one's society. But what about a child born with Down's syndrome? Today's level of medicine will enable him to live for at least 20 to 30 years, but he probably will not have the capacity to make any great contribution to society during his life. Perhaps a healthy young man has a car accident and becomes disabled. Though he goes on living, he is never able to have a family or work. A very old man wonders about his own value. He seems able to do nothing but sit in bed and swallow pills. There are many such examples. What meaning can be given to the lives of people who are able to do so little? Is it more sensible (and even more humane) to let them die, even to *help* them die?

In the ancient Greek city of Sparta babies born with physical disabilities were left to die. However, we don't have to go that far back to find people who justified killing others because they were no longer "socially useful." In 1920 a scientific article was published in Germany under the title "About the Ending of Life Which Does Not Deserve to Live." The article argued that compassion for the incurably sick meant supporting their escape from suffering through an intentional death. This seemingly humane approach was widely spread and supported by German doctors. Some years later, using this view to justify their actions, Nazi doctors moved from helping the sick to providing forcible euthanasia for the incurably ill and mental patients. This process gradually developed into the state program of "race cleansing" — the murder of millions of innocent people who were deemed unsuited to live.

Let us return to the sources of these mass killings. The doctors might have believed that they were pursuing a noble aim, namely to help hopeless cases and end their suffering. But eventually their thinking led them in a horrible direction. When did they cross the boundary between compassion and cruelty? How can we morally assess this reality?

Before we can determine how moral intentions can turn into immoral ways of thinking, we must address the underlying question of the value of human life itself.

Rodion Raskolnikov

In Russian culture and spirituality, the discussion of such topics is often associated with Fyodor Dostoyevsky, all of whose works in some way deal with the problems of the human soul, the search for meaning and the true value of human life.

Let us turn to the novel *Crime and Punishment*. Many of you may have read the



novel or know its plot. The protagonist is Rodion Raskolnikov, a young man, a former student who finds himself in extreme poverty. In one part of the novel, he tells his friend Pokorev about a pawn-broker, in case he should ever want to pawn anything. Raskolnikov eventually visits her with two articles for pawn: his father's old silver watch and a little gold ring with three red stones that his sister had given him as a keepsake. The old woman, Alyona Ivanova, gives him a rather negative impression, and as he has tea in town, he finds that "A strange idea was hatching in his brain, like a chick in an egg, an idea that he was beginning to find more and more fascinating." As luck would have it, next to him are a student and friend who are discussing Alyona Ivanova! She is portrayed as a famous moneylender, but also as a "frightful old she-devil" with a bad temper. Even if you are only one day late in redeeming your pledge, you might not see it again. As a rule she offered her customers about 25 percent of what the article was worth and charged five or seven cents per month on it. He also learns that Alyona has a sister, Lisaveta, whom she treats like a small child, even beating her cruelly.

Crime and Punishment

"And I tell you what: I'd gladly murder that damned old woman and rob her of all she has, and that I assure you, without the slightest compunction," the student added warmly. The officer laughed again, but Raskolnikov gave a start. How odd it was!

"Now, look here, let me ask you a serious question," the student said, growing more and more excited. "I was joking, of course, but look at it this way: On the one hand, we have a stupid, senseless, worthless, wicked, and decrepit old hag, who is of no use to anybody and who actually does harm to everybody, a creature who does not know herself what she is living for and who will be dead soon, anyway. You see what I mean, don't you?"

"I do," said the officer, watching his excited friend attentively.

"All right; now listen, please. On the other hand, we have a large number of young and promising people who are going to rack and ruin without anyone lifting a finger to help them — and there are thousands of them all over the place. Now, a hundred or even a thousand of them could be set on the road to success and helped at the very start of their careers on that old woman's money, which is to go to a monastery. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of lives could be saved, dozens of families could be rescued from a life of poverty, from decay and ruin, from vice and hospitals for venereal diseases — and all with her money. Kill her, take her money, and with its help devote yourself to the service of humanity and the good of all. Well, don't you think that one little crime could be expiated and wiped out by thousands of good deeds? For one life you will save thousands of lives from corruption and decay. One death in exchange for a hundred lives — why, it's a simple sum in arithmetic! And, when you come to think of it, what does the life of a sickly, wicked old hag amount to when weighed in the scales of the general good of mankind? It amounts to no more than the life of a louse or a black beetle, if that, for the old hag is really harmful. For one thing, she is ruining the life of another human being — she is really wicked, I tell you: Only the other day she bit poor Lisaveta's finger from sheer spite, and it was only saved from amputation by a miracle!"

"Well, I quite agree she does not deserve to live," observed the officer, "but don't forget it's human nature we are dealing with here."

"My dear fellow, but even human nature can be improved and set on the right path, for otherwise we should all drown in a sea of prejudices. Otherwise there wouldn't have been a single great man. People talk of duty or conscience. Well, I have nothing against duty or conscience, but are you quite sure we know what those words mean? Wait, let me ask you another question. Now, listen."

"No, you wait and let me ask you a question. Listen!"

"Well?"

"Here you go on talking and making speeches at me, but tell me, would you kill the old woman *yourself*?"

"Of course not! I was merely discussing the question from the point of view of justice. Personally, I'd have nothing to do with it."

"Well, in my opinion, if you are not ready to do it yourself, it's not a question of justice. Come on, let's have another game."



Influenced by this discussion, Raskolnikov murders the old woman and sets off a chain of tragedies. By chance, Lisaveta is at home, and Raskolnikov murders her too. A peasant who worked in the house where the old woman lived confesses to the crime, and another life is nearly ruined. When Raskolnikov's mother finds out what happened, she goes mad and dies.

Later, while he is sick, Raskolnikov has strange dreams in which he finds that others besides himself have the right to decide the fates of others, and all people destroy each other like "cockroaches," like "lice."

The whole world is a victim of some terrible unseen and unheard of plague, which goes to Europe from the heart of Asia. ... Some new trichinas have appeared, some microscopic beings implanting themselves in people's bodies. The people who had received them went crazy at once. ... Everybody was anxious and did not understand the others. ... They did not know whom and how to judge, what was good and what was bad. They did not know who was to be killed and who was to be acquitted. People killed each other in some senseless rage. In towns the bells tolled day and night, and called everybody, but no one knew who was calling and what for. No one knew that and all were anxious. ... In some places people got together, agreed to something, swore not to part, but immediately began something quite different from what they had just planned, began to blame each other, fought and cut each other. Fires and famine began, everything was perishing. The plague grew and spread further. ...

The theory of “two classes”

What is the beginning of this destructive chain of events? What is the idea that Raskolnikov tried to bring into life, and against which Dostoyevsky speaks so ardently?

Without prejudices
We consider everybody zeroes
And ourselves figures.
We all try to be Napoleons;
Millions of two-legged creatures
Are nothing more than a tool for us. ...

This quotation from Alexander Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* best describes Raskolnikov’s theory of “two classes” of people — geniuses and “lice.” Raskolnikov considers his theory a great discovery, without noticing that he is just joining the eternal logic of the world he hates.

Raskolnikov’s crime began not with the murder of the old woman, but with the “two classes” idea itself. Dividing people into two such groups answers many questions — for instance, who has a right to live and who hasn’t. The old money-lender, according to this idea, is the most useless, the most harmful “louse.” But this list can be continued endlessly. As soon as a person appropriates to himself the right to make such decisions, it is impossible to stop. It is not by chance that Dostoyevsky shows how one crime leads to a whole chain of deaths and sufferings.

It is not enough to determine
morality by loyalty to one’s ideas. It
is necessary to constantly ask oneself:
Are my ideas right?

— Fyodor Dostoyevsk

Raskolnikov’s theory seems to free a person from conscience, placing him beyond the judgment of good and evil; if the author of the theory is a genius, everything is permitted to him. But an inevitable question arises: What are the criteria for dividing people into two classes, and who possesses the right to do so? What if someone considers Raskolnikov himself a “louse”? Among the “extraordinary” people, someone always wants to be the most “extraordinary.” The idea of two classes is a deadly boomerang from which it is impossible to escape.

There are numerous historical examples of people practicing ideas similar to Raskolnikov’s. Dictators, for example, have assumed the right to determine the destiny of others and deem who is worthy of living and who should die. Many attempts, however, inevitably fail as they do in the novel. The spilling of blood can engender nothing but more blood, and murder never leads to happiness.

As soon as we forget that every person has a right to live and that life is valuable in itself, we stand on the edge of moral catastrophe.

Why was it wrong for Raskolnikov to kill the old woman?

Dostoyevsky showed a profound understanding of the depths and heights of human nature. In one sense, each person has the potential to become like Raskolnikov. At different times we too may be tempted by a similar stream of thoughts and ideas. We should be aware of this possibility, recognize that it is wrong and not continue to think in this way. Part of the problem is that people can use reason to justify, especially to themselves, almost anything they do. From the point of view of pure reason, Raskolnikov thought he was doing the right thing. So why was it wrong to kill the old woman?



- ✕ Raskolnikov didn't respect the old woman as someone who had a right to live the life of her own choosing. Instead, he treated her as a means to an end. She was the means by which he would become rich and thus, he thought, benefit mankind. The end — the good of mankind — justified her murder. But this was a mistake. Human beings are not to be treated as means to an end. They are ends in themselves, and the purposes they give their own lives should be respected.
- ✕ The old woman herself obviously did not want to die. If she had, she would have killed herself. Just because Raskolnikov could not imagine that she had a life worth living did not mean that she saw her own life in those terms. The poem "A Crabby Old Woman" (printed below) shows that it is very easy to misjudge what goes on inside the soul of an old person.
- ✕ Raskolnikov took a very utilitarian approach to human life. The greater happiness of mankind would far outweigh the possible unhappiness of the old woman. But if we follow this logic, who will be spared? Isn't it unjust for an innocent person to be put to death for the sake of a community?
- ✕ The philosopher Immanuel Kant proposed that we should do only those things that we want everyone else to do. In other words, would Raskolnikov want his way of thinking to become a universal principle for everyone to follow? Would this bring good consequences? In his dream, that is what happened.
- ✕ From a religious perspective the value of human life is primarily determined by the relationship that human beings have with God, their Creator. As each person is a child of God, each is also absolutely loved by God — old and young, beautiful and ugly. Unlike a religious perspective, Raskolnikov saw the old woman as an old animal. He did not wrestle with another perspective. If this woman had been his own mother, would he have done such a thing?

What is the value of a human being?

Human life is extremely precious and should never be ended lightly. Nobody should decide arbitrarily whether a person should live or not. On the other hand, we cannot be guided in all situations by the belief that life itself is an *absolute* value. There are situations when it is more moral to end life. There are a few exceptional cases when killing has been justified.

One of the exceptions is self-defense, since the right to life implies the right and duty to defend one's own or another person's life from an unjust attack. Is killing a person in self-defense excusable? This question has been considered for many centuries by philosophers, and certain guidelines have been suggested.

The degree of violence used for self-defense should be considered. Defending the life of self, family or group should be in proportion to the violence of the unjust attack. It is less defensible if in self-defense the attacker is more seriously injured than actually necessary. Self-defense should not be used to take revenge on the attacker.

It is possible that in the process of defending himself or another person, the intended victim may kill the assailant. Nevertheless, it is important that his purpose was not to kill the attacker, but only to preserve his own or another person's life. The

moral duty to defend oneself concurrently prescribes the moral duty to use as little violence as possible resulting in the least harm possible to the assailant.

Theories about a “just war” have developed from this principle of self-defense. First, war should only be a last resort after peaceful methods of achieving justice have failed. Second, war can be justified in defense of one’s country or the defense of another country that is being unjustly attacked. In the expansion of an empire war remains unjustified. War also should not be used as a punishment to smaller nations that cause a non-violent offense. Third, the expected good results of a war must also outweigh the harm. Is it worth the loss of life? And finally, the methods used in war must also be just. The excessive use of force or cruelty is not acceptable.

Apart from war, most violent deaths occur due to a lack of respect for the sanctity of life. Murder victims are often related to their assailants. Perhaps this is also due to an ignorance of what “the sanctity of life” really means. In what ways is human life valuable and worthy of respect?

Each person's life has unique value

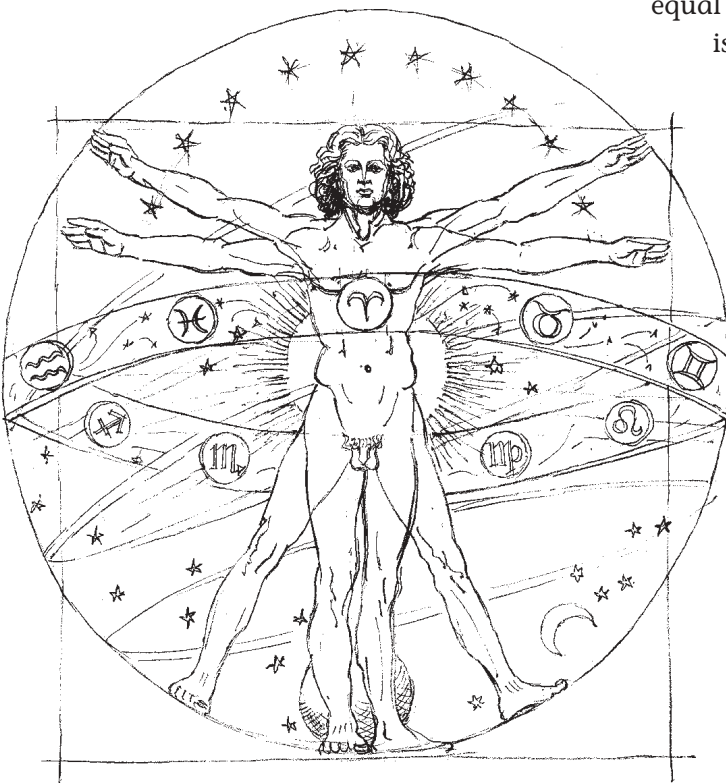
Generally speaking, something that is rare is more valuable than something that is common. Diamonds and gold are highly valued compared to glass and copper. Even though there are more than 4 billion people on the earth, no two are identical. Every person is unique, even physically. It is well known that every person has his own unique set of fingerprints. Nothing on earth is more rare than a human being.

This means that each person can make his own unique contribution to human existence in a way that no one else can. Each person can make us happy or sad in his own way. Can you imagine how dull the world would be if all people were alike? So we should respect and value each person’s uniqueness and individuality and help each person to fulfill his potential.

Each person's life has cosmic value

Imagine a perfect machine with millions of cooperating parts. If each part is unique and not a single part can be found or made anywhere in the whole world, then even the most simple part in the machine will be

equal to the value of the whole machine, because if it is broken or lost, the machine will stop functioning. In the same way, the life of any person has a value equal to the value of the whole universe.



Each person's life has divine and eternal value

In what way is human life more valuable than that of animals? How can we say that the life of a tiny human baby weighing 4 kgs is worth more than a cow that weighs 200 kgs? A religious person may reply that we are God’s children, created in His image and likeness. However, in order to fulfill this divine value, one needs to follow a path of moral and spiritual growth.

Therefore the religious attitude to life is one of reverence for human life from the moment of conception to extreme old age and



death. The rest of the natural world supports the human community and should be treated with care and respect. The life of any human being, however, is of greater value than the life of any animal.

Most religious people believe that there is life after death and in this way life has eternal value. What we do and what happens to us will affect us in some way for eternity.

The value of life and human responsibility

If we have such a deep understanding of the value of human life, we will be ready to give ourselves to help nurture the seeds of beauty and goodness existing in every human soul, because if we forget about our responsibility, this person's goodness may be lost to the world.

If we treat the very category of life as something sacred, then we will be less likely to remain indifferent in situations that threaten the life and dignity of other people; we won't encourage humiliating those who are not like ourselves, be it a classmate who is bad at mathematics, an old drunkard in the street, or someone whose ideas are alien to us. If we are consistent in our beliefs, we won't take part in any

activities that threaten the human dignity of other people — representatives of other social groups, parties, nations, countries or races.

The way to rebirth

But let us return to the novel. Dostoyevsky showed the disastrous effect of Raskolnikov's theory. However, after telling us how such ideas destroy the personality of their bearer, he also leads his character along the way of atonement and resurrection. He shows how the gradual realization of the destructiveness of his ideas brings Raskolnikov to a genuine rebirth.

At first Raskolnikov does not even consider the possibility that he might be in the wrong. Only an hour before coming to the police he says to himself:

Crime? What crime? My murdering a nasty, wicked louse, the old money-lender, who is good for nothing, for whose murder 40 sins may be forgiven, is it a crime? I am not thinking of it, I am not going to wash it away. ... I wished people good myself, and I could do hundreds, thousands of good deeds instead of this stupid thing, not even stupid, just awkward. ...

Raskolnikov is convinced of his righteousness for more than two years, and his conviction grows even stronger. He thinks he was mistaken in practice but not in theory. It is only while he is in prison that he begins to understand his crime, and it is here that his resurrection begins.

At the very beginning of the novel, just thinking over his ideas, Raskolnikov suddenly faces a question: "Will the sun be shining even *after that*?" And after the murder the sun seems to fade for him — the sun that was shining in his soul. When he is in prison, his fellow inmates, many of whom are murderers and thieves themselves, intuitively feel how deadly his theory is. They do not like him and try to avoid

him. Only on the day when love sparkles again in his soul, when he feels “by all his lost being” that he has been reborn, “it even seemed to him that other prisoners, his former enemies, were looking at him differently. He even started speaking to them and was answered in a kind way.” It seems that the words the policeman Porfiry Petrovich once said to Raskolnikov begin to come true: “Maybe people won’t see you for a long time. But it is not time, it is yourself that matters. Become the sun and everybody will see you. The sun must be the sun first of all.”

This living life is something so simple and straight, it looks so straightforwardly at us, that this clarity and straightness prevent us from believing it is the very thing we have been looking for all our lives. ... The simplest things are understood only in the end, when we have tried everything which seemed more complex or more stupid.

— Fyodor Dostoyevsky
“Teenager”

Dostoyevsky concludes the novel by writing: “Here a new story begins, the story of a gradual renewal of a person, the story of his rebirth, of his gradual passing from the world to another, to a new, unknown reality. ... ”

Raskolnikov’s way to rebirth is long and difficult. The changes that take place in him are essentially due to the selfless love of Sonechka Marmeladova; through her he begins to see each person as a Person, not as a “louse” or a “genius.”

Human beings do not possess many truths, but all of them, though they are received again and again at great cost, are necessary and salutary — like bread, like water, like air. However, the most important truths seem at first trivial “commonplaces”; their simplicity seems primitive, and their salutary importance is understood too late, after various temptations, snares and losses. But then, at the hour of sobering, the well-known things become at last clear, and commonplaces turn out to be burning revelations.

A Crabby Old Woman

What do you see, nurses,
What do you see?
Are you thinking
When you're looking at me
A crabby old woman,
Not very wise,
Uncertain of habit
With far-away eyes,
Who dribbles her food
And makes no reply,
When you say in a loud voice
"I do wish you'd try",
Who seems not to notice
The things that you do,
And forever is losing
A stocking or shoe,
Who unresisting or not
Lets you do as you will
With bathing and feeding
The long day to fill?
Is that what you're thinking?
Is that what you see?
Then open your eyes, nurse,
You are not looking at me,
I'll tell you who I am
As I sit here so still,
As I move at your bidding,
As I eat at your will.
I'm a small child of ten
With a father and mother,
Brothers and sisters who
Love one another,
A young girl of sixteen
With wings on her feet,
Dreaming that soon now
A lover she'll meet.
A bride soon at twenty,
My heart gives a leap,
Remembering the vows
That I promised to keep.
At twenty-five now
I have young of my own
Who need me to build
A secure happy home,



The writer of this poem was unable to speak, although she was seen to write from time to time. After her death, her locker was emptied and this poem of her life was found.

A woman of thirty,
My young now grow fast,
Bound to each other
With ties that should last.
At forty my young sons
Now grown and will all be gone
But my man stays beside me
To see I don't mourn.
At fifty once more
Babies play round my knee,
Again we know children
My loved one and me.
Dark days are upon me,
My husband is dead.
I look at the future
I shudder with dread,
For my young are all busy
Rearing young of their own,
And I think of the years
And the love I have known,
I'm an old woman now
And Nature is cruel
'Tis her jest to make
Old age look like a fool.
The body, it crumbles,
Grace and vigor depart,
There now is a stone
Where once I had a heart.
But inside this old carcass
A young girl still dwells,
And now and again
My battered heart swells,
I remember the joys,
I remember the pain,
And I'm loving and living
Life over again,
I think of the years
All too few – gone too fast.
And accept the stark fact
That nothing can last.
So open your eyes, nurses,
Open and see,
Not a crabby old woman,
Look closer – see Me.

Kate

CHAPTER 19

Awareness of Resistance

As long as imperfections exist within oneself, there is room for change and growth. However, all of us have some resistance to change, because change involves the possibility of threatening whatever makes us feel comfortable and secure. Our resistance to change often stands in the way of real freedom and happiness. Only by recognizing our resistance can we overcome it and grow into the persons we want to become.

Am I completely satisfied with myself the way I am?

Before we begin on the path of changing our habits or attitudes, we are confronted with the question, “Why? Why should I change?” This question may be answered by yet another question, “Am I totally satisfied with the way I am right now?” Have you ever wished that you had acted differently in any situation? Are there times when you wish you had acted differently with your parents, brothers or sisters, teachers, friends, or grandparents? Everyone has an idea of the way he would like to be different. Imagine yourself as you would like to be.

Within each person there are many undeveloped facets and talents. If we want to realize the fullest potential of our inward gifts, we must grow out of or change habits, thought patterns and ideas that may hold us back.

Recognizing these things — the things that hold us back from our true potential — and acting to change them to habits, thoughts, patterns, and ideas that are complementary to our higher selves is not easy, but it is probably the most fulfilling thing that we will ever try to do. Often we hide our real selves under layers of pretense. People think you are a certain way, when in actuality you are very different. As you change, you grow closer and closer to being the person you are capable of being. At each stage you shed a cloak of your unreal self, or the part of yourself you had temporarily created in order to fit in or to get by.

You may begin by asking yourself, “How could I act differently so that I would feel better about myself and be better understood by others?” This may be something very simple — such as doing something for someone else — or very complicated — like trying to change the way you understand things by taking another person’s point of view in a conflict.





To grow, you'll need to give yourself permission to have many new ideas, to be creative. You are creating the most important thing in your life — yourself. You could stop the whole process right here, by convincing yourself that you just can't, or that you might "look foolish," or that your "luck's always bad." You may ask yourself, "What's the use anyway?" or "Why am I even bothering to take this course?" or anything else to keep you exactly where you are now. It is because of such myths that people are kept trapped, hopeless and helpless by their convictions about the impossible. But if you have the courage, start with some idea about how you would like to be: more assertive, less serious, more open, less hard-working, more honest, more determined, or anything you want. You decide!

Now that you're ready — ready to change — you may say again, "But, but, but I ... can't." Why not? Before continuing, let's take a look at the reasons many people give themselves for not changing. Becoming aware of your own resistance is the first step to overcoming it. After looking at some excuses for not changing, we'll get back to discussing how to overcome the resistance that lies within each of us.

How do we resist change?

Our actions often show our resistance:

Changing the subject in a conversation; leaving the room; being late; getting sick; doing unnecessary work, wasting time; refusing to pay attention; ending a relationship; looking away or out of the window when someone is talking to us.

We often assume things about others to justify our resistance to change:

It wouldn't do any good anyway.

My friends won't understand.

I would have to change my whole personality.

Only crazy or really sick people need to do that.

No one can help me with my problem.

My parents have never been able to help me.

My case is different.

I don't want to bother them.
It will work itself out.
If you were in my place, you'd do the same.
It's better just to leave things as they are and not to cause a big problem.

We grow up with beliefs that become resistance to change:

It's not done. It's just not right.
It's not acceptable. A real man isn't like that.
My family never did that.
I'm not that kind of person. It's impossible. It'll never work.

We give our power and responsibility to others and use that as an excuse for our resistance to change:

This isn't the right environment.
They won't let me change. I don't have the right book.
If my teacher were different, perhaps it would work out.
I don't have time.
They will have to change first.
My parents won't let me.

Sometimes we deny the need to change:

I'm all right. There's nothing wrong with me.
I like my life just the way it is.
I can't do anything about it.
What good would it do anyway? Problems are just a fact of life.

By far the biggest category for resistance is fear:

I'm not ready yet. I might fail.
They might reject me.



What would my friends think of me?
I don't know enough.
I can't.
I don't want anyone to know I have this problem.
I don't want to talk about it.
I don't have the energy.
Who knows where I might end up? I may lose my freedom.
It's too hard.
I can't do it well enough.
I might lose my friends.
I don't trust anyone.

Concepts we have about ourselves that we use to resist change:

I'm too old, young, fat, thin, short, tall, ugly, attractive, lazy, strong, weak, stupid, clever, poor, worthless, silly, serious, stuck.

The benefits

With all the reasons we have not to change, let's look at the benefits that we will experience as a result of changing. Start with the pros of how you are now, the benefits from your present way of acting. Look carefully at the hidden benefits whenever you have a situation you would like to change. Unless you recognize the benefits and replace them with some other gains, you may be defeated in your attempt to change.

You are actually re-creating yourself when you change. You are the end result of many factors — the way you were born, the way your parents treated you when you were a baby and a young child, the relationships you made, the culture you live in, the decisions you have made. The facts about your origin cannot be changed, but you can change your understanding and your response to your situation.

Many of the renowned people in history came from seemingly impossible circumstances, but regardless of their circumstances they developed their inner potential. To do this takes work and determination, and in many cases people have accomplished great things in part due to the obstacles that life brought to them. They succeeded not because of what they were or had originally, but because of what they did.

In order to change, you have to decide what you want specifically to change and then imagine yourself as that new type of person, or someone who acts in a new way given a similar circumstance. When you are able to actually change your bad habits and nurture within yourself the kind of characteristics that you respect in others, you will feel a great sense of achievement and satisfaction. You will realize that you are able to control many things about your life that may have been controlling you. And over a period of time (after you have changed your old, undesirable habits into new and desirable ones), you will feel the effects of your change in many ways — the way you feel about yourself, the way other people see you, the uncovering of hidden talents or skills. Read through the following list of bad habits turned into good habits, and see if any might belong to you.

Instead of saying or agreeing with unkind words about other people when they are not around,

You can ...

Refrain from agreeing with negative comments about others and even defend their reputation when they are not present.

You get ...

Good feelings from your conscience and you are building a reputation as someone who is trustworthy.

Instead of avoiding new experiences or challenges because of a fear of failure, such as not trying out for the football team or dance group,

You can ...

Get involved in activities and explore new challenges to learn to develop your talent.

You get ...

Satisfaction from overcoming your fears about failing, and you may make new friends while you are doing it. You may also find that other people have similar fears. You can learn that you are able to overcome your resistance more easily the next time because of the intrinsic rewards of doing what you really want to do.

Instead of constantly waking up later than you would like,

You can ...

Rise in time to do everything you need to do to prepare for the day.

You get ...

A great feeling of control over your body, instead of feeling that you are at the mercy of your body's desires. You may even find that you start your days more consistently, leaving yourself more energy for the rest of the day.

Instead of eating non-nutritious junk food that you don't need and that makes you feel a little sick,

You can ...

Choose healthy food most of the time.

You get ...

Better physical health, which helps you to get up early in the morning, gives you more energy and gives you a feeling of confidence that you can control your physical desires.

Instead of telling your friends and family nice things or giving them compliments when you really feel what you're saying is not sincere,

You can ...

Practice being honest about what you think and how you feel in a polite but forthright manner.

You get ...

A feeling of satisfaction and pride that you have not compromised your integrity.

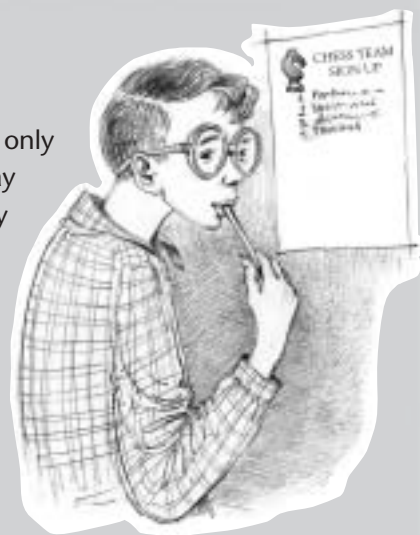
These are just some of the things people often don't like about themselves and seek to change. Of course, many other bad habits or manners could be listed as candidates for change. Can you make your own list? Make sure to list not only the bad habit, but also the good one you might turn it into and the benefit of changing it. Start out by trying to develop good habits which are not too difficult, and do not try to change everything at once. Give yourself time, and be your own friend by letting yourself have success in the beginning. If you try to do too many things at once, you may become frustrated and discouraged. So, just change one habit at a time and enjoy the remaking of you!

The secret of managing your fears

Stand back and look at the fears that stop you from changing and increasing your self-respect and happiness in life. Chances are that you fear rejection, failure or some other sign that you do not “measure up” or that your worst fears about yourself might be true. Possibly you would rather be afraid that you are defective than be convinced of it. For that reason you are afraid to try a change or even to consider one.

Andre — A Case of Fear

That year I had decided I would be on the chess team. My school had just begun a team, and the first tournament was in only a few weeks. The other kids in the class didn't know I could play chess — I never told anyone — but I had been playing with my uncle Anton since I was really young, and honestly speaking I was very good. I had to sign up that week. There was just this paper on the wall to sign up outside the director's office — no big problem. But every time I walked by to sign up, I couldn't. I even picked up my pen a few times and almost signed my name, but every time the same thing would happen — I would begin to think about what would happen when the other kids saw I had signed up. They didn't know how good I was, and they might make fun of me, and even if no one noticed or said a thing, what if I couldn't play during the games? I always got so nervous in front of other people. But I really wanted to play. How could I be on the chess team? I couldn't even think about it without getting knots in my stomach, and every time I picked up that pen to sign up, my heart would race a little and my palms would start to sweat. I was stuck, I was afraid, and I know it seems like such a little thing, but I never did bring myself to sign up for the chess team. Anyway, it's not that important, and it would probably interfere with my schoolwork. I guess it's not that important to me.



Something to think about



Do you think Andre was honest with himself? What was he afraid of? If you were his friend, what would you say to him? Do you think he is afraid of many other things in his life and this is just one way his fear shows? How do you think he could get over his fear?

No one is intrinsically bad. Everyone is capable of both superb and horrible actions and everything in between. The challenge of life is to make the best of what you have within you, and part of being the best you can be is to go beyond your fears. Fears about failure come from thinking that you are not good enough, or that you have a high probability of failure. How many people have you seen fail? When you see someone try with all his effort and fail, do you shun that person and think that he should never have tried? Or do you want to see that person get up from where he left off and try again? Even in the Olympics, fantastic athletes fail sometimes — skaters trip, runners fall, and gymnasts flounder — but this is the exception, and it does not mean that the person is not worthy or talented — it just means that he has to keep trying.

Which person do you respect more, the one who tries to do something really difficult, who stretches himself to the point of his limitations, even though he may not gain complete victory — or the person who never even tries? Trying takes effort, and going beyond your fears takes a lot of effort. The next time you want to change, to grow, to re-create yourself in some way, think about it: What do you have to lose?



What do you have to gain?
Try this reasoning: “If I try to do what would increase my self-respect despite my fears, then I am courageous, I am doing the best right now that I can.”

Focus on your strengths

Mastering change requires you to use your strengths to take action, to choose to overcome weakness and pessimism. Change is basically a question of whether you want to focus on your weaknesses or your strengths. In order to focus on your strengths, you must begin

by identifying your strengths. What are you good at? What personality characteristics do you have that are positive? Are you good at listening to others and understanding them? Are you good at taking responsibility for important things and getting your goals accomplished? Are you good at remaining calm and level-headed in the midst of confusing or frightening circumstances? Are you flexible, able to adjust easily to new ideas, people and places? Are you reflective and able to understand the motivation behind the actions of others? Are you good at leading groups of people? Can you speak publicly? Where do your strengths and talents lie?

To identify your personal strengths, begin by making a list. Ask yourself what is really good about the way you think or behave or the talents that you have developed. You may look at this in two ways: personal characteristics (things about your character that are good), and things that you do well. These may complement each other, or one may lead naturally into the other.

Fold a piece of paper in half, and label each half 1-5. The list on the top half of the paper should be five personal characteristics that are your strengths, and the list on the bottom half should be five things that you are good at. You may choose to make a longer list, but think of at least five things for each category.

Example

Personal Characteristics

- ✕ I am patient with other people, even when they are rude or difficult.
- ✕ I like people. I enjoy being with all kinds of people, and I have a fairly open mind when it comes to talking to people who may be very different from me. (I like to talk to old people, and young children too.)
- ✕ I have a lot of energy, and I usually finish something I have made a determination to do.
- ✕ I am perceptive and usually can understand what people are really saying or feeling.
- ✕ I have a good sense of humor, and do not take problems and upsets too hard.

Things I Am Good At

- ✕ I am good at math.
- ✕ I am good at making birthday cakes.
- ✕ I am good at working out finances (sometimes I help my Dad to figure out our family's finances).
- ✕ I am good at creating things on the spur of the moment — for example, if I am asked to speak in class on a topic for which I did not prepare beforehand, I usually can do so without great difficulty.
- ✕ I am good at arguing a point, sticking to my beliefs, while still having an open mind and listening to what someone else has to say.

Once you are aware of what you are good at doing, you may start to use these characteristics and abilities to help you grow to your fullest potential. Realizing that you have so many positive traits may come as a bit of a surprise at first, but if you can be honest with yourself, you will find that many good things lie within you, and it is up to you how you use these abilities.

In Conclusion

Know and believe that you are fine, even magnificent, despite your human defects,

Because you are so aware of your humanness ... or just:

Because you are alive ...

Because you are unique ...

Because you can choose ...

Because you are sensitive enough to feel life's inevitable conflicts ...

Because you try ...

Because you are willing to take a chance ...

Because you are willing to fail and learn from each mistake ...

Because you feel pain ... jealousy ... anger ... loneliness ...

Because you have the potential to help someone else appreciate their uniqueness and beauty ...

Because you may see something no one else has noticed ...

Because you are you, with all your strengths, weaknesses, fears, hopes and limitless potential.

For Your Journal



- ✕ Make an "I can" list. Complete the sentence "I can ... " with 10 things you are capable of doing.
- ✕ Propose an experiment to improve your current life situation. What are the risks? What are the benefits? Who will decide if it is worthwhile to try ?
- ✕ Is fear the major thing that blocks you from changing? Are you waiting for something to decrease or eliminate your fears before doing what you'd like to see yourself doing?
- ✕ Have you ever loved something or someone so much that you did not mind facing all kinds of obstacles on their behalf? Describe who or what you loved and the obstacles you had to deal with.

CHAPTER 20

Judaism: A Covenant Relationship

Judaism is the oldest of the world's great monotheistic religions and is the parent of both Christianity and Islam. There is no one identifiable founder in Judaism, and it is not only a religion but also a people. Jews have a very strong sense of their own history and their identity as bound up with that history.

The Jewish scriptures start with God's activity in the Creation of the cosmos, the Garden of Eden, the fall of man and the subsequent history of salvation. In Judaism, history is the arena of God's purposeful activity. More than any other religion, Judaism cannot be understood apart from its history.

The Jewish people themselves can be traced back to the ancient Mesopotamian civilization about 3,800 years ago. They were different from their neighbors because they broke away from the belief in many gods and the use of idols. Instead, they

believed in one God who is just and merciful, who gives human beings laws so that they too can be just and merciful. They served God not just through prayer and sacrifice but also through acts of kindness and hospitality. And they believed that God was active and could be discerned in the patterns of history.

The history of the Jews is recorded in the Bible. It is an unusual account, since all the faults, mistakes and weaknesses of the forefathers of the Jewish people are recorded as well as their successes.

The Patriarchs

It is from Abraham that the Hebrews traced their lineage. There is a fascinating story of how Abraham came to believe in the one God and thus indelibly changed world history.



The following account is adapted from Louis Ginsberg's *Legends of the Bible*, written in 1909. Ginsberg pieced together the oral legends of the rabbis and the early Christian Church fathers. A similar account can also be found in the Koran:

Abraham and the idols

When Abraham was born, Nimrod was king. Nimrod thought he was a god, and he made all the people worship him. He had statues built to which people had to bow down. However, one day Nimrod found out that a man would be born who would show his religion to be a lie. Nimrod was terrified and had all the baby boys put to death. When Abraham's mother discovered she was about to give birth, she fled into the desert and had her baby secretly. Not being able to take care of Abraham, she abandoned him in a cave and prayed that God would protect him.

The angel Gabriel took care of Abraham, and he grew up very quickly. Walking along the edge of the valley one evening, Abraham saw the stars and said to himself, "These are the gods!" But when the dawn came, and the stars could no longer be seen, he said, "I will not worship the stars, for they are not gods." Then the sun came up and he said, "This is my god; him I will worship." But the sun eventually set, and Abraham said, "He is no god." Seeing the moon, he said, "I will worship you." But the moon became obscured by a cloud and he cried out, "This too is no god. But there is One who created heaven and earth and who sets them all in motion."

After meeting the angel Gabriel, Abraham went to find his parents. When he met his mother, he told her who he was and what had happened. He told her that there was only one God, who was living, everlasting and great, who sees but who cannot be seen. "He is in the heavens above, and the whole earth is full of His glory."

His mother took him home to meet his father, Terah, who was an idol maker. That is to say, he made the images of the god Nimrod that people worshiped. One day when Terah was sick, he told his new-found son to take some idols into the market to sell. As Abraham was walking to the market, an old woman came up to him and asked him how much the idols cost. He replied, "Old woman, why do you want to buy this piece of wood to worship? My father only made it last week. It is not even as old as you, and yet you want to worship it?" The old woman was astonished and asked Abraham whom he worshiped. Abraham replied that he worshiped the God who created the heavens and the earth but who was invisible. The old woman believed him and became his first follower. But when Abraham went home and told his father what had happened and that he had not sold any idols, Terah was very angry.

One day Terah had to leave home, and so he said to his son, "Since you are not a good salesman, you can stay at home and guard the idols." When his father had gone, Abraham went into the room where all the idols were kept. He talked to them but they would not reply. Then he gave the biggest one a meal. He left the room and came back several hours later, but the meal was untouched. So he took an ax and smashed the idols. When his father came home, he saw the idols were broken. He called Abraham and demanded an explanation. Abraham said, "I brought the biggest god a meal. But the other gods were jealous. So they all had a big fight and they beat each other up." Terah was very angry. He decided to take his unbelieving son to see the god, King Nimrod.

When Nimrod heard from Abraham that there was an unseen God who created the heavens and the earth and who sat in judgment upon all people including the king, Nimrod was very angry. "There is no god greater than I," he said. He had Abraham flung into a burning furnace. However, Abraham did not die. When he was released, God told him to leave home with his family and his several hundred followers and go to Canaan.

Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their extended family traveled to Canaan. It is recorded in the Bible that God established a covenant with Abraham and promised him that one day the land would belong to his descendants.

Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, from whom are descended, respectively, the Jews and the Arabs. Isaac and his wife Rebecca had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob had twelve sons, who, tradition says, were the forefathers of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

However, it is through Moses and the historical events associated with him that the Jewish consciousness was profoundly shaped. It is to them that we now turn.

The life of Moses

During Jacob's lifetime, his family migrated into the land of Egypt. At this time Egypt was ruled by the Hyksos — a Semitic people who had invaded Egypt in 1710 BC and established the 15th dynasty. Under their rule, the Hebrews prospered and grew in numbers and prosperity. When the Hyksos were driven out of Egypt in 1540 BC, the Israelites (the descendants of Jacob and his sons), who were associated with them, came to be regarded as a threat to subsequent dynasties. It is probable that gradually they were persecuted and increasingly discriminated against until finally they were enslaved.

The period of the Israelites' slavery in Egypt lasted, according to the Bible, for 400 years. It is commonly believed by scholars that about 1275 BC, during the reign of Rameses II, the Exodus led by Moses took place.

According to the Bible, the Egyptian Pharaoh, frightened by the growth rate of the Hebrews, ordered that all Hebrew baby boys should be put to death. Moses avoided this fate through a ruse of his mother's. He was adopted by the Pharaoh's daughter and brought up in the palace as an Egyptian prince. Moses' mother, who was employed as his nurse, taught him about his true background. When he was 40 years old, he saw an Egyptian slave driver beating a Hebrew. Feeling the suffering of the slave, he struck and killed the Egyptian. The Pharaoh heard about what he had done and sought to kill him. So Moses fled to the wilderness of Midian.

Many years later, after he had married and had a son, while herding his sheep one day Moses saw a burning bush that was not consumed by the fire. In wonder, he approached it to investigate, and God spoke to him.

"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

— Exodus 3:7-8

God asked Moses to go back to Egypt to bring the Hebrews out of slavery. Moses, however, found many excuses why he was not suited to the task. Moses was very unassuming. He did not self-confidently and ambitiously agree to be the leader. On the contrary, he had to be pressed very hard by God to do the job.

Finally, Moses and his brother Aaron went to Egypt and won the support of the elders of the people of Israel. Together, they went to see the Pharaoh and addressed him.

"This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.' " Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go."

— Exodus 5:1-2

Instead, the Pharaoh increased the Hebrews' workload. According to the Bible, God responded by bringing upon Egypt a series of plagues and disasters. Each time the Pharaoh asked Moses to stop the disaster. But each time, after the trouble ceased, Pharaoh changed his mind and refused to let the Hebrews go. The Hebrews could see that Pharaoh was a stubborn and evil man, one who did not keep his word. Many Egyptians sympathized with the Hebrews, and even the Pharaoh's servants turned against him. Moses' prestige among everyone rose. The people started to gain confidence that Almighty God was on their side.

The final calamity was the death of all the first-born among the Egyptians. The Pharaoh's own son died. In his grief, finally the Pharaoh gave permission for the Hebrews to go. The relieved Egyptians showered the departing Hebrews with gifts of gold, silver and clothing.

The Exodus

According to the Bible, 600,000 men and their families left Egypt and traveled into the desert. As soon as the Pharaoh realized he had lost his work force, he pursued the Hebrews with an army and 600 charioteers. In front of the Israelites was the Red Sea. When they saw the dust clouds of the approaching Egyptian army, the Israelites were afraid and complained to Moses:

"Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"

— Exodus 14:11-12

Moses, however, encouraged the people to put their trust in God. He stretched his staff over the sea. A strong east wind blew all that night, and the water was divided. Dry ground appeared, and the Israelites crossed the Red Sea

safely. However, the water closed up on the pursuing Egyptians, who were all drowned. The exact location of the crossing is unknown, although it is thought to be to the north of the Red Sea. Miracles such as these could have been the coincidence of natural phenomena happening at the "right" time.

The Israelites traveled in the desert toward Mount Sinai, guided by a pillar of fire during the night and a pillar of cloud during the day. Soon their supplies of food and water were exhausted. The Israelites grumbled and complained to Moses and Aaron.

"If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days."

— Exodus 16:3-4

The covenant

After many adventures, trials and tribulations the people arrived at Mount Sinai. Moses perceived the presence of God on the mountaintop. He climbed the mountain, and there God spoke with him.

"This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be



my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.

— Exodus 19:4-8

God had demonstrated His love and care for the people. He had liberated them from slavery and brought them out of the land of Egypt. He wanted to lead them to Canaan, a land “flowing with milk and honey.” But He also wanted them to be “a holy nation and a kingdom of priests.” God wanted them to be His people. He wanted to make a covenant with them. A covenant is a relationship that is binding, wholehearted, enduring and based on mutual loyalty. The emphasis is on mutual belonging and enduring responsibility, even if there is unfaithfulness. Such an intimate relationship, because it is based on trust, is characterized by great inner freedom. Of course, such a relationship can only be freely entered into. It cannot be forcibly imposed. So God was wooing the Israelites, as a man might woo his prospective bride. God wanted to propose to them, but before that He had to win their trust.

So when they accepted His proposal, God told them to purify themselves for three days, washing their clothes and abstaining from sexual relations. Then Moses once again went up the mountain, where God revealed to him the Ten Commandments and gave him guidance about other matters.

These were the conditions of the covenant. If the people kept them, they would be blessed by God. If they acted faithlessly, God, as their parent and king, would punish them until they recognized the error of their ways, repented, and practiced once more the true way of life. After receiving the Words from God, Moses told the people all the Lord’s words and laws, and they responded with one voice, “Everything the Lord has said we will do.”

This was very important. God was not asking them to agree to something they did not fully understand. The laws were simple, just and easy to understand. The people responded and agreed to keep the laws which God had given them. There followed the covenant ceremony to make the covenant binding.

Through this ceremony the people of Israel became God’s kinsmen. No longer were they to be slaves belonging to and ruled by evil kings. Now they were God’s family. Like all families, the relationship was often stormy, and the dialogues of the prophets show the intimacy and freedom they felt in their relationship with God.

After the covenant was established, God once more called Moses to go up the mountain and receive the two tablets of stone upon which were carved the Ten Commandments. To receive the tablets, Moses fasted for 40 days. Meanwhile, the people at the foot of the mountain grew restless. Moses had been away a long time, and others came forward to challenge his leadership and policies. They pressured Aaron into making a golden calf, an idol which they then worshiped. God was shocked by the way the people quickly forgot their promises and attributed to an idol the saving work God had just wrought. He spoke to Moses:

The Ten Commandments

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

— Exodus 20:1-17



“Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’ I have seen these people,” the Lord said to Moses, “and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”

— Exodus 32:7-10



Moses, however, was no ordinary leader. Even though the people caused him a lot of frustration and pain, he stood up and defended the Israelites before God. He reminded God that He, too, was obliged to keep the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob:

“Why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’” Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

— Exodus 32: 11-14

That Moses could change God’s mind shows that the covenant was a living, dynamic relationship.

The Israelites later built the Tabernacle, a portable temple in which was placed the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark contained the two tablets of stone. This was the focal point of Jewish religious ceremony. The Tabernacle was later replaced by the Temple, built by King Solomon in 960 BC.

These two events, the Exodus and the occurrences at Sinai, liberation and covenant, formed the two pillars of Judaic self-understanding. They were two sides of the same coin. The liberty they had been granted was to be preserved and guaranteed by the covenant. The law protected people’s freedom as it prevented people from oppressing each other. The goal was the promised land, a land of milk and honey, of prosperity. But prosperity without an ethical dimension would have led back to tyranny and injustice. The only way the Israelites could remain free was if they became a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. In a nation filled with righteous people, no one goes in fear of losing his life, or of his property being stolen. Promises are kept, and the strong do not terrorize the weak.

Into Canaan

The Israelites then continued on their journey to Canaan. However, conditions in the desert were not easy, and the people often grumbled. Sometimes the hardships they experienced as slaves in Egypt seemed mild in comparison.

“If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost, also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!”

— Num. 11:4-6

Moses told God about the situation, and in his words we see revealed the honest relationship he had with God.

“Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now — if I have found favor in your eyes — and do not let me face my own ruin.”

— Num. 11:11

Finally, after 21 months, they reached the border of Canaan. Moses sent out 12 men to spy on the land for 40 days. When the spies returned, they gave their report to the people.

“We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large.” Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.”

But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

— Num. 13:27-14:4

Since the people were not yet ready to enter Canaan, they were doomed to wander in the wilderness for another 40 years. Almost all the people who left Egypt died in the desert. It was their children who crossed the River Jordan into the Promised Land. Moses himself could only look at Canaan from the top of a mountain before he died.

“The Lord God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the earth.”

— Deut. 7:6

A chosen people

Jews are sometimes called the chosen people. This term is often misunderstood. Indeed, many people find it offensive, since it suggests that God has favorites. This notion has become a source of much misunderstanding and hostility. There have been other nations that have thought they were chosen by God to rule over other peoples because they were superior. For the Jews, though, the term means responsibility,

not privilege. Whereas all other people are required to observe only seven of the commandments (this is explained in the next chapter), Jews have to keep 613 laws, as part of their covenant with God. They see themselves as chosen to serve God and to suffer the ordeals that such service entails. By establishing the covenant with God and accepting the demands of the Mosaic law, they suffered the penalties for its violation.

“You only have I known of all the families of the earth; Therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities.”

— Amos 3:2

The Jewish notion of being chosen was not exclusive. God loves all the nations and wants to save them all. Israel was just to be the means through which this salvation was to be mediated.

Thus we can understand the implications of being “chosen.” Individuals and nations who think they have some special calling can look to the Bible to see what the responsibilities of such a position are. The failure to acknowledge such responsibility has led to egoism on individual, national and racial levels. Unfortunately, many who thought they had a special calling understood this to mean they should have unlimited power and could do no wrong. The Old Testament, by contrast, is an extraordinarily honest litany of all the errors and sins committed by the Jewish people. In this sense it is without precedent. Whereas other nations hid their wrongdoings and boasted of their accomplishments, the Old Testament recounts all the wrongdoings of the people and gives all the credit to God for anything good.

Something to think about



- Why do you think Moses was reluctant to agree immediately to become God’s prophet?
- How do you understand the notion “covenant”? What examples of covenant relationships do you know?
- Why does it often happen that people first enthusiastically respond to new ideas, but then start to doubt them?
- Do you agree with the statement “It is one thing to be freed from slavery. It is another thing to be a free man”?
- To what extent is it important to understand the meaning of any new responsibilities and their consequences before accepting them?
- How do you understand the phrase “The only way to keep freedom is to become a righteous people”?
- What is the relationship between the notions “chosen” and “responsible”? Imagine that you are chosen for some high position. Would it change your life — your views, your attitude toward people, your material well-being? If so, what kind of changes?

For Your Journal



After a shipwreck you and your class are stranded on a desert island. There is no hope of being found. You are faced with the necessity of creating a new society. What kind of society would you like to see? How should it develop? What obstacles do you think you will meet? What will you do to enable an orderly and equitable society to develop, so that a majority of the people on the island will be happy? Explain the steps you think would be necessary. Would your classmates agree with your plans, or would there be problems?

Moses and the Fox

Adapted from *School for Prayer*, by Anthony Bloom

Moses finds a shepherd in the desert. He spends the day with the shepherd and helps him milk his ewes. At the end of the day he sees that the shepherd puts the best milk he has in a wooden bowl, which he places on a flat stone some distance away. Moses asks him what it is for, and the shepherd replies, "This is God's milk." Moses is puzzled and asks him what he means. The shepherd says, "I always take the best milk I possess, and I bring it as an offering to God." Moses, who is far more sophisticated than the shepherd with his naive faith, asks, "And does God drink it?" "Yes," replies the shepherd. "He does." Then Moses feels compelled to enlighten the poor shepherd, and he explains that God, being pure spirit, does not drink milk. Yet the poor shepherd is sure that He does, and so they have a short argument, which ends with Moses telling the shepherd to hide behind the bushes to find out whether in fact God does come to drink the milk. Moses then goes out to pray in the desert. The shepherd hides, the night comes, and in the moonlight the shepherd sees a little fox that comes trotting from the desert, looks right, looks left and heads straight for the milk, which he laps up, and disappears into the desert again. The next morning Moses finds the shepherd quite depressed and downcast. "What's the matter?" he asks. The shepherd says, "You were right. God is pure spirit, and He doesn't want my milk." Moses is surprised. He says, "You should be happy. You know more about God than you did before." "Yes, I do," says the shepherd, "but the only thing I could do to express my love for Him has been taken away from me." Moses sees the point. He retires into the desert and prays hard. In the night in a vision, God speaks to him and says, "Moses, you were wrong. It is true that I am pure spirit. Nevertheless I always accepted with gratitude the milk which the shepherd offered me, as the expression of his love, but since I am pure spirit, I do not need milk, I shared it with this little fox, who is very fond of milk."



CHAPTER 21

The Teachings of Judaism

The Torah

When Moses met God on Mount Sinai, he was given the Torah. The word means “law,” although it is used in a number of ways. First, it can refer to the first five books of the Bible. Torah can also refer to the whole Bible (the Christian Old Testament), which is known as the written Torah, or Tanach. However, many of the things that God told Moses while he was on the mountain were not written down. This was information about how the commandments were to be applied. Moses passed this information on to the elders by word of mouth, and the elders passed it on to their successors, from generation to generation. This is known as the oral Torah, and in written form it is much greater than the written Torah. There is also a third meaning, the sense in which Torah is a pre-existent idea through which God created the world, and on which He wanted the world to be based.

The written Torah can be divided into three sections:

- ✕ **Torah** (the Five Books of Moses): These contain the stories about the creation of the world, the patriarchs, and the commandments and ethical ideals of the Jewish people set in a historical framework.
- ✕ **Prophets:** The books of *Judges*, *Samuel* and *Kings* continue the history of Israel. They are deeply concerned with the moral problems that historical figures faced. The books of the prophets such as *Isaiah* and *Amos* are mainly concerned with teaching faith, justice and compassion.
- ✕ **Holy Writings:** The books in this section are quite varied and include historical books such as *Esther* and *Nehemiah*; wisdom literature such as *Proverbs* and *Job*; and poetry and songs such as the *Psalms*.

After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the Jewish people were dispersed and no longer had their own state. Worried that the oral tradition would be lost, Rabbi Judah the Prince wrote down the oral Torah in about 200 AD. This work is known as the Mishnah and runs to 63 volumes.

In the centuries that followed, the Mishnah was studied and discussed by rabbis in the academies of Jerusalem and Babylon. Rabbi Judah had included an enormous number of different opinions on many topics, and the rabbis wanted to know what they meant in practice. Their discussions were carefully written down by scribes. In about 500, the rabbis combined each paragraph of the Mishnah with the discussions that had taken place around it. The result was a massive work known as the Talmud. Until today the Talmud has been the main subject studied in Jewish academies.

Judaism has always sought to improve the character and behavior of people. These are among the concerns of the Bible and the Talmud. Jews always regarded

Torah study as important because it could lead to good deeds. A first century rabbi expressed the relationship between study and behavior like this:

Anyone whose good deeds are more than his wisdom, his wisdom will endure. Anyone whose wisdom is more than his good deeds, his wisdom will not endure.

Throughout the ages there has always been a special type of literature devoted to character training and guidance for good behavior. The oldest of these is the book of *Proverbs*. It stresses the importance of people learning from their parents and accepting the wisdom of the ages. Here is some advice from that book on the risks of temptation and immorality:

My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck.

When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you.

For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life, keeping you from the immoral woman, from the smooth tongue of the wayward wife.

Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life.

Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.

There are also many other pithy aphorisms in the book of *Proverbs* that stick in a person's mind. They are often composed in verse and, being very catchy, are automatically recalled by the memory at the appropriate moment.



Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred.

A kind-hearted woman gains respect, but ruthless men gain only wealth.

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.

The world stands on three things, on justice, on truth and on peace.

— Ethics of the Fathers

Justice

In Jewish teaching, justice is one of the pillars on which the world stands. It is not always easy to achieve, however. Imagine, for example, a rich man and a poor man who commit the same crime and are given the same heavy fine. The poor man might have to sell some of his possessions to pay the fine, while the rich man leaves the courtroom laughing that he got off so

lightly. Is it justice if we treat them the same? On the other hand, is it justice if we treat them differently?

Recognizing the difficulties, the rabbis taught, “If you come too close to fire, you will get burned. If you stay too far away, you will be cold. The art of judgment is to find the right distance.” They realized that at times a judge had to be more severe with some people than with others. They themselves were far more strict with learned people.

They also taught that justice had to be tempered with mercy. “The Lord is merciful and gracious” (Exodus 34:6). The rabbis taught that one should follow the example of God in many things. Since being merciful is one of God’s characteristics, justice and mercy must go hand in hand.

When God was about to create the world, He thought, “If I create it with mercy alone, then sinners will multiply; if I create it with justice alone, how will the world endure? I shall therefore create it with both justice and mercy, and in this way it might endure.”

— Midrash

Seven Commandments of the Sons of Noah

Judaism teaches that all human beings were created to serve God by living a righteous life. Six commandments that teach the right way of life were given by God to the first man, Adam; one more commandment was given to Noah and his sons. That’s the origin of the “Seven Commandments of the sons of Noah.” “Sons of Noah” means all humanity, for according to Torah all people are descendants of Noah and his family who were saved from the flood. But this expression also has a deeper meaning. “Sons of Noah” are his spiritual descendants and followers, who inherited his righteousness and ability to follow the will of God in spite of the lack of spirituality in society.

Let us describe briefly the commandments of Noahide code.

1. No blasphemy

Blasphemy and cursing God are forbidden. People are expected to develop a sensitive and respectful attitude toward godly matters.

2. No idolatry

Idolatry can be either the worship of many gods (polytheism); trying to represent God by an image; or the worship of an object, nature or people. The first is forbidden

because the belief in many gods results in a lack of a consistent moral standard. The second, because God is so far beyond our understanding that He can never be portrayed as an image. The third because we should worship the Creator, and not something that is created.



3. No murder

Every human being is very valuable in the eyes of God. Any act that directly or indirectly leads to the death of another person is forbidden. That is why no one should be left without enough money to survive. It is also sinful not to save a human life when one has such an opportunity. Abortion, suicide and euthanasia are not permitted.

4. No adultery

Family and all family relationships are considered to be of very high value and importance. Sexual love is necessary for continuing the human species and is also a God-given way for a husband and wife to express their love for one another. That is why this commandment forbids not only adultery but also

incest (sexual relationships between close relatives — parents and children, brothers and sisters) and homosexuality.

5. No theft

People and institutions have the right to own and enjoy their property. Theft is taking for oneself any amount of somebody else's property, even a penny.

6. No cruelty to animals

In the ancient world there were forms of idol worship that required tearing limbs from live animals and eating them. Jewish thought forbids this as well as causing unnecessary pain to any living creature.

Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees.
With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.
Open my eyes that I may see
wonderful things in your law.
I am a stranger on earth;
do not hide your commands from me.
My soul is consumed with longing
for your laws at all times.
I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.
I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.
I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.
Do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth,
for I have put my hope in your laws.
I will always obey your law, for ever and ever.
I will walk about in liberty, for I have sought out your precepts.
I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame,
for I delight in your commands because I love them.
The law from your mouth is more precious to me
than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.

— Psalm 119

7. Justice and law

Human society has the duty to establish and support a system of justice, enforced by courts of law, in order to enable people to live together in harmony. That is why every person should respect the laws of any state as long as they don't contradict these seven commandments. The last commandment also calls us to actively intervene in any events that are obviously unjust.

From the point of view of Torah, anyone who follows all the commandments of this code is considered to be righteous and has his share in the Kingdom to come. The law states that one should live in peace with such righteous people, whatever their

nationality or religion may be, and if necessary, protect them as if they were members of one's own community.

Jews believe that these seven commandments, seven basic ethical norms, were given to humanity by God as the only foundation for universal morality. This code is the only real basis for dialogue and mutual understanding among people and for the establishment of world peace.

Freedom and responsibility

I have set before you today life and death, the blessing and the curse: therefore choose life.

— Deut. 30:19

Observing all these laws does not limit a person's freedom, since every person is still completely free to choose whether to do good or evil. The laws are not regarded as a burden or a restriction of liberty; on the contrary, Jews regard the law as the guarantor of liberty.

Certain things are decided by God, such as whether a person will be healthy or sick, clever or dull, rich or poor. Jews believe that God makes those decisions each New Year. This is why at the celebration of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) ten days before the New Year, Jews try to forgive anyone who has done them wrong, and search out and ask forgiveness from anyone they might have offended during the past year. Still, within each situation a person is entirely free to make moral choices. This means that each individual is responsible for his or her own actions.

The Mitzvot

And now O Israel, what does the Lord your God want of you? To walk in His ways ... to keep, for your own good, the commandments of the Lord.

— Deut. 10:12-13

Whereas all human beings have the seven Noahide commandments to keep, Jews must observe many additional rules. They call them mitzvah (plural mitzvot), which means "commandment." Jews use this term when speaking of the rules God wants them to keep. There are 613 mitzvot, of which 248 are positive commandments and 365 are negative commandments, those things Jews are commanded not to do. These additional mitzvot were given to the Israelites by God at Mount Sinai.

During the 40 days on the mountain, Moses received many other commandments apart from the Ten Commandments that were engraved on the tablets of stone. It is this historical event that is the source of the understanding of justice and law which is used in half the world. Here are a few of the other laws that were given about 3,500 years ago:

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.

— Deut. 10:17-19

Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

— Lev. 19:15

Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.

— Exodus 23:8

A thief must certainly make restitution. If the stolen animal is found alive in his possession, he must pay back double.

— Exodus 22:3-4

Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry.

— Exodus 22:23

Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. — Deut. 24:14

Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. Use honest scales and honest weights. — Lev. 19:35

The mitzvot cover every area of life. They include those activities people usually associate with religion, such as praying or observing holidays, as well as many things which people might not think of as religious at all. Industrial relations, the conduct of a trial, divorce proceedings and the food Jews may or may not eat, all come within the scope of the 613 mitzvot. Keeping the mitzvot requires leading a disciplined life.

Jewish morality



In Jewish thinking, keeping the commandments is an important part of character training. But morality can never be a matter of simply keeping the rules. People have to develop inwardly. “The mitzvot were given for the purpose of refining the people,” says the Talmud. For Jews, living by the commandments is a way to moral and spiritual development, which is an essential part of serving God. By living in this way, people refine themselves and bring holiness into the world.

Jews believe that by fulfilling the commandments they are communicating with God. An ancient Jewish teaching says that God “wrote Himself into the Torah.” For Jews the commandments are God’s will and wisdom expressed in human speech. By having mitzvot that cover every area of life, the whole of a person’s life can become an act of service to God. Through honoring these commandments, even the smallest action becomes imbued with meaning and holiness. Thus, even ordinary actions such as eating a meal or going to bed are transformed into ways of serving God.

For example, a Jew starts the day by thanking God for waking him up. After this he washes his hands using a jug of water and a bowl that were placed by the side of the bed the night before. This washing of the hands is an act of purification,

as the priests of old used to wash their hands and feet before entering the Temple. Each day is full of opportunities for serving God, so beginning the day is thought of as entering the Temple.

Each mitzvah has something to teach. For example, the laws concerning the punishment of criminals emphasize the need to respect human dignity; those concerned with damages and compensation stress personal responsibility; and the laws on borrowing and lending teach compassion for those less well off than oneself.

One class of commandment, the *chukim*, need special mention as they have no external logic. They are regarded as a test of a Jew’s faith, and observing them

strengthens it. The commandments about eating kosher food are examples of *chukim*. Only certain animals, birds and fish are kosher and may be eaten. Even then, they have to be prepared in a particular way.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might.”

— Deut. 6:5

“The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.”

— Psalms 111:10

Foundations of Jewish piety

The love and fear of God are the two foundations of Jewish piety. Love of God inspires a person to fulfill the 248 positive commandments. Fear is the reason for not violating the 365



negative commandments. Fearing God can mean many things. In its lowest form it means fear of being punished for doing wrong. A higher form of fear is feeling shame at the very thought of sinning. Fear is only the beginning, not the end, of wisdom.

Growing in the law

And these matters which I command you today you shall take to heart. And you shall teach them carefully to your children, and you shall speak to them.

— Deut. 6:6-7

Five is the age for starting to study scripture, ten for Mishnah, thirteen for observing the commandments.

— Ethics of the Fathers

When does a child become an adult? This is not an easy question to answer. First, individuals mature at different ages. Second, there are different kinds of maturity: A person may be mature physically but not emotionally, and vice versa. However, in Jewish law there has to be a certain age at which the majority of individuals are regarded as being on the way to full maturity. That age is 12 for a girl and 13 for a boy. At these ages young people can begin to feel responsible for their own actions.

To mark this transition from childhood to adulthood, there is an important rite of passage called bar mitzvah for boys and bat mitzvah for girls. By this time young people are expected to have learned how to live according to the mitzvot and will be

held responsible for their actions. During a celebration meal they declare their intention to accept the obligations of being an adult. From this point, a young person enters into a covenant relationship with God, both as an individual and as a part of the community.

Administering the law

From the very earliest times, Jews were commanded to set up a system of justice to administer the laws. In the law courts judges would try offenders, settle disputes and issue rulings on religious matters. There were three levels of Bet Din, or courts. Ordinary trials were conducted by a Bet Din of three judges. They questioned the witnesses themselves and, after considering the evidence, gave a verdict. When someone

was standing trial for an offense that carried the death penalty, a Bet Din of 23 judges tried the case. Matters of national importance required a Sanhedrin, a court of 71.

In the courts, circumstantial evidence was never admissible. A person could only be executed if witnesses had given a warning, pointing out the possible punishment, and then actually seen the crime carried out in front of their eyes almost immediately. If a person had heard a scream, and then rushed into a building to find a person standing over a body holding a knife that was dripping blood, the death penalty could not be enforced because no one had actually witnessed the crime. So although the death penalty was always a possibility, it was rarely carried out.

The workings of a Bet Din depend on the careful examination of witnesses by impartial judges. Very high standards of truth and reliability are expected from both. People with a criminal record may not appear as witnesses, nor may dishonest traders or gamblers. A judge too can be disqualified if there is the slightest risk that he might be partial. The Talmud tells the story of a rabbi who was getting into a boat. A man standing nearby put his hand out to help him. As the rabbi thanked him, the man mentioned that he was due to appear before him in court. "In that case," said the rabbi, "I am disqualified from being your judge."

Suffering

Not to have known suffering is not to be truly human.

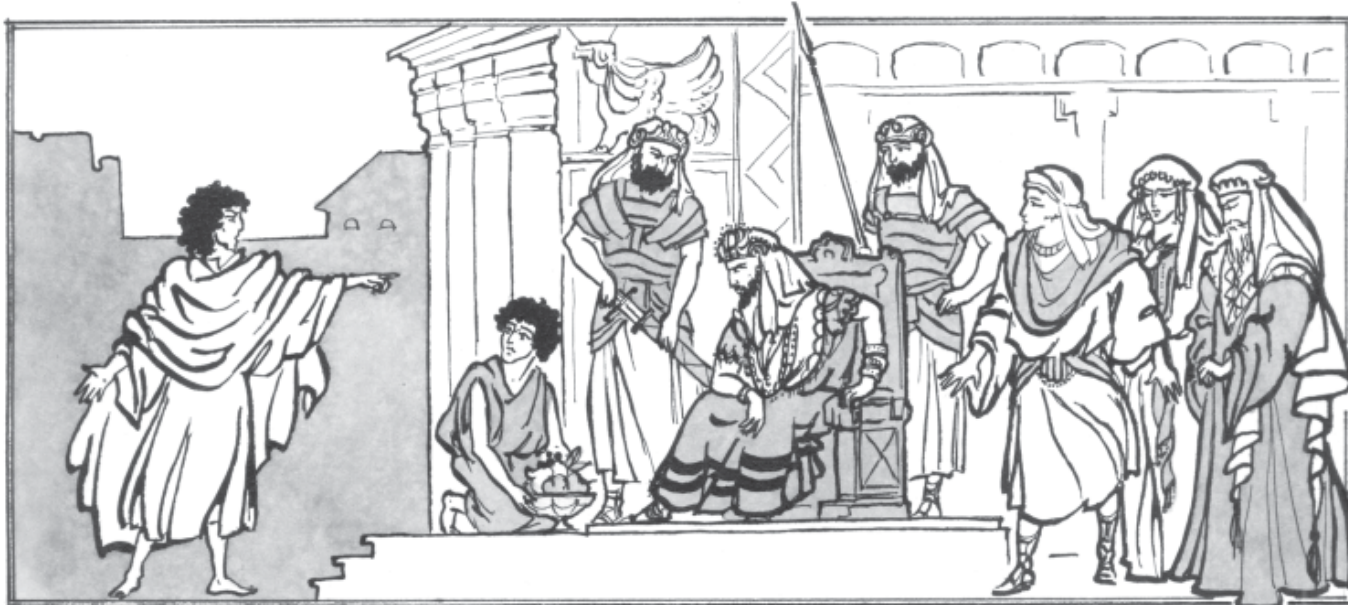
— Midrash

One of the questions that vexed Jewish people more than anything else was why there was suffering and how it could be understood. In the Bible there are many stories of people who suffer and how they coped with their suffering. Some notable examples are:

- ✕ Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers (Genesis 37)
- ✕ King David, whose infant child died (2 Samuel 12)
- ✕ Job, who lost his home and family but never complained to God.

As they discussed the Talmud, the rabbis offered some insights into suffering. Suffering is many-sided and has no single explanation. Here are some of their explanations:

- ✕ "If a man should suffer, let him examine his deeds. If he has sinned, let him repent. If he finds nothing, let him attribute his suffering to neglect of Torah study. If this, too, is not so, then for sure his afflictions are sufferings of love."
- ✕ "The righteous suffer for the sins of their generation."



- ✕ “The potter does not test cracked vessels, because if he taps them even once they break. He only tests good vessels, because no matter how many times he taps them they do not break. So God does not test the wicked, but only the righteous.”
- ✕ “Which way leads to the world to come? The way of suffering.”
- ✕ “God says, ‘If I grant you happiness, give thanks; if I bring you suffering, give thanks.’”

The rabbis did not seek to justify suffering, but they accepted it as a fact of life. Even though every effort should be made to prevent and alleviate suffering, it has its positive side and through it people sometimes emerge as better people.

Something to think about



- How do you understand the statement “Anyone whose good deeds are more than his wisdom, his wisdom will endure. Anyone whose wisdom is more than his good deeds, his wisdom will not endure”? What is the relationship between knowledge and action?
- One proverb says: “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” Why do pride and a haughty spirit often lead to committing evil?
- What is more important for you — mercy or justice? Why should justice go together with mercy?
- Do you agree that the Seven Commandments of the Sons of Noah are the basis of universal morality?
- To what extent is one free to choose between good and evil?
- Why do Jews keep the 613 mitzvot?
- How do you understand the statement “Fear is only the beginning, and not the end, of wisdom”?
- When and in what way do people become responsible for their actions? Do you think you have already reached this level of maturity?
- Why is it important to expect very high moral standards from judges?
- Do you agree with the statement that “the righteous suffer for the sins of their generation”? Are people sometimes held responsible not only for their own actions, but also for the conduct of their family and country?

The Ten Commandments

Although the Ten Commandments are about 3,500 years old, they are still relevant today. They form one of the chief sources of law for much of the world’s population. So we will take a closer look at what they mean and how they might be applied in today’s world.

1. You shall have no other gods before me.

The first commandment is about priorities. It means that God is to be loved and honored above all other people or things. God should be first in a person’s life and at the heart of his relationship with everything else. However, this wholehearted love for God does not lead to a lessening of the value of humanity. The commandment only emphasizes the importance of right order. We can, and should, love and respect many people and things as well. The problem always comes when people put something else, which may still be very valuable and important, before God.

2. You shall not make for yourself an idol.

This commandment emphasizes the dignity of man. Man is the crown of the creation. Therefore, if man bows down to what is created, he leaves his position as the Lord of Creation and instead becomes its servant. Idolatry is worshiping not only things created by man but even those created by God, such as the sun. It is treating as divine something that is only natural.

Idolatry takes many forms in the modern world. For example, many people appear to worship material goods and prosperity — having the latest fashion is the most important thing to them. Others idolize and hang on every word of pop stars, and some worship the human body through pornography or Mr. Universe competitions. It is not unusual for an individual, the state or a party to be regarded as the ultimate arbiter of truth and law, and the source of social well-being. In the case of nationalism, many people worship their own nation.

Even religions themselves may slip into idolatry when they worship something such as scripture, a tradition, a doctrine or even the religion itself.

3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

We communicate with one another through language, and we can only understand each other if we use words in the same way. If words lose their meaning through misuse or overuse, our ability to communicate is impaired. When words such as “God,” “love,” “peace” and “truth” are treated profanely, we can no longer speak to each other clearly about these most sacred and important matters. This limits the depth of our relationships with one another. Since religion is one of the deepest and richest dimensions of human experience, misusing God’s name denigrates that which is most sacred. This has a corrupting effect upon the whole of language.

This commandment is also aimed at the misuse of religion, the numinous power of the holy, to further one’s own ends at the expense of the welfare or lives of others. It provides a check on the authority bestowed to priests, ministers and clergy leaders and guides them away from using fear to compel allegiance to religious demands. Unfortunately, it is not unusual for religious leaders to threaten that God will punish those who disobey or disagree with them.



4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

The Sabbath is the last day of the week. According to the story of creation in Genesis, on the seventh day, after seeing that everything He created was “very good,” God rested. The Sabbath, then, commemorates the creation of the world. Life’s meaning is not to be summed up in work or usefulness to others. It is easy to become overly involved in life’s daily tasks, so that one loses sight of what is most important in life. The Sabbath was established for man’s benefit. It is a time for rest, prayer, study, and reflection. It is a family day, a day of joy and peace.

5. Honor your father and your mother.

The family is the basic unit of society, and it is through the family that values, traditions, knowledge and skills are transmitted from one generation to another. Thus, a society in which family values are distorted or abandoned is itself distorted and will disintegrate. The



central relationship linking the generations is the relationship between parents and children. A person who dishonors his parents by cursing them or attacking them undermines one of the main pillars of society.

Both parents and children have certain responsibilities toward one another. Parents are expected to feed, clothe and educate their children, and see that they can support themselves. They are expected to raise their children to be moral people. They are to give moral guidance and, more importantly, show a personal example. As the Orthodox priest Alexander Elchaninov said, "In the education of children, the most important thing is that they should see their parents leading an intense interior life." So this commandment is not only for the children but also for the parents. It

says to parents, "Make yourselves the kind of people your child will want to respect." For their part, children are expected to respect and listen to their parents and take care of them, especially in their old age.

When people grow old, they can often no longer work enough to be able to support themselves and contribute to the community. However, the ability to work and the quality of what one can produce are not what decide the value of human life. Although work is important, it is not everything. Even if they can no longer work, old people should be respected and taken care of. Through their life's experiences they have accumulated wisdom and knowledge, a very precious resource which should be inherited by the young. This is why in traditional societies the older a person is, the more highly he is regarded.

6. You shall not murder.

In Hebrew, there are different words for different types of killing. The word used here is "*rasah*," which was used to describe the killing by a private citizen of his enemy. This is a premeditated killing committed out of malice. It is to be distinguished from the more general "killing." While it is always wrong to kill, sometimes it happens accidentally and sometimes it can be justified — for example, in defense of oneself or one's country during a war.

This commandment stresses the sacredness of human life. Since life is a gift from God, each person has unique and infinite value. The right to life is the basis of all other human rights, natural and legal, and is the foundation of civilized society. No one has the right to end his or her own life or that of another person.

7. You shall not commit adultery.

Sexual love is holy yet natural. It is holy because God is love, and natural because it is created by God. Adultery, though, destroys the most intimate and precious of human relationships — the love and trust between a husband and wife. It is the violation of the covenant between a husband and wife. So this commandment protects this conjugal relationship and the human hearts that would be hurt by such an act.

Furthermore, as well as being a sin against love, by destroying or seriously harming marriage, adultery undermines the family. When sexual order collapses, parental authority also collapses as children cannot respect parents who say one

thing and behave in the opposite way. At the same time, if conjugal love is damaged, the love of the parents for their children may also be compromised. Children may grow without receiving the benefit of the love and guidance from both parents as they need. In this way adultery is also a crime against one's lineage. Since the family is the basis of society, anything that undermines the most holy of relationships undermines all relationships and thus society.

8. You shall not steal.

Stealing is taking, without permission and usually in secret, something that belongs to someone else. This includes fraud and the intentional non-payment of debts, which have the same effect. Stealing is not limited to individuals. Groups, businesses and governments are all capable of stealing.

This commandment teaches us how we should relate to things. Although God created the world and thus is its ultimate owner, He gave humankind the right of dominion over it. This is so that people, created in the image of God, can develop their own creativity and become co-creators. Thus, the things that we own and create are in a sense an extension of our personality. The rule against theft protects the natural desire to own and enjoy one's proper possessions undisturbed. In communities where such a law is observed, people do not lock their doors or worry about keeping their possessions secure. This state of affairs benefits everyone, both the rich and the poor. The rich and powerful are protected from theft, and the less well off are protected from the powerful.

Owning something does not entitle us to do with it as we please. Ownership entails obligations to treat what we own with respect and not to abuse it. Also, people who are wealthy have an obligation to be generous and use their wealth for the benefit of the community. Although Mosaic Law confers the highest sanctity on the principle of personal ownership, human life is far more valuable than property and people were never executed for theft.

9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

Lying poisons human communication and destroys trust. When we lie, we deceive others and we deceive ourselves. Words are very powerful and, once spoken, cannot be unsoken. In the Old Testament, if a person was found to have falsely accused someone of a crime, he would receive the punishment that would have befallen the person he accused.

This commandment protects truth in human relationships and also applies to slander, the telling and spreading of falsehoods about people or groups with the intention of harming them. Such activity is evil, both in its origin — since it springs from envy, hatred, malice and stinginess — and in its effects on those injured and those who are deceived. Unfortunately, religious groups also commit this sin when they attack “competing” religions in order to prevent them from growing.

10. You shall not covet.

Coveting is desiring to own something that belongs to someone else. Of all the Ten Commandments, this is the only one that applies directly to thoughts rather than to external actions. Since evil actions always start from evil desires and thoughts, it is best to nip such desires in the bud. When someone is blessed with good fortune or wealth, we should be happy, not envious. Envy, the sorrow at another's good fortune or the rejoicing in another's misfortune, eats a person up and destroys happiness.

Something to
think about



- What do you think of the idea that the same law should be applied in the same way to everyone?
- What is most important in your life?
- Do you honor or worship anything? If so, why?
- Can you think of examples of language being misused and thereby debased?
- Can you think of any words in your language that have lost their original meaning due to misuse?
- Can parents lose their authority because they have lost the trust of their child?
- How should you behave if you disagree with your parents?
- Why does the Bible make a distinction between murder and killing?
- How does adultery damage individuals, families and society?
- Does adultery always produce feelings of pain and jealousy?
- Do you think people have a moral right to own things?
- Is it ever right to steal?
- What are the responsibilities of those who have wealth?
- Should we always tell the truth?
- What would a society be like if people could not be trusted to keep their promises?
- What happens when a society allows false witness in court?
- Do you envy other people?
- Would it make you secretly happy if some misfortune happened to someone you disliked?

Lord of the Flies

The novel *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding is about a group of British schoolboys who are stranded on a desert island. Two of them, Ralph and Piggy, find a conch shell which Ralph blows to call everyone to a meeting. Jack, who is the leader of a choir, proposes himself to be chief. However, it is Ralph who is elected. He gives authority over the choirboys to Jack, and it is agreed that they are to hunt animals for food. To make the meetings manageable, it is decided that the person holding the conch is the one who has the authority to speak. Ralph, with Piggy's advice, decides that the most important priority is to build shelters and keep a fire burning so that they can be rescued.

The children, however, are soon distracted from such tedious tasks by the glamour of pig hunting. They play games and develop rituals around the killing of a pig they catch one day for food. Some of the small children spread rumors of a beast hiding in the forest, and fear starts to corrupt their earlier innocence. As the thin veneer of civilization wears off, their "games" become more and more realistic until a boy, who tries to tell them he has discovered what misled them into thinking there was a beast, is killed.

The relationship between Jack and Ralph becomes more and more tense, and Jack leads the hunters out of the group and sets up his own tribe at the other end of the island. The hunters want to cook a pig they have killed and steal Piggy's glasses to make a fire. This leads to a final confrontation.



To read

Chapter 11 "Castle Rock" from *Lord of the Flies*,
by William Golding



CHAPTER 22

Good and Evil

Ignorance of good and evil is the most upsetting fact of human life.

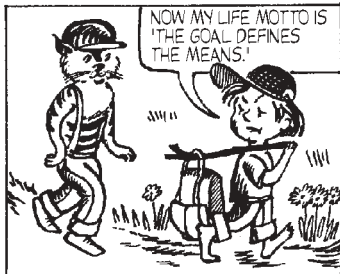
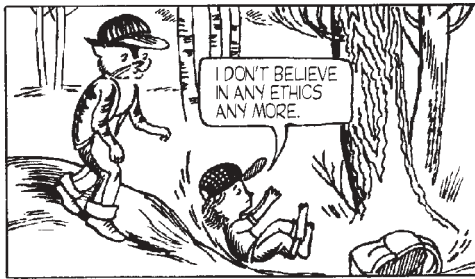
— Cicero

Often we are faced with a moral dilemma. What is right and what is wrong? How do we decide what to do? By our motivation? By the consequences? Or by the act itself? At some point we all struggle with these questions, and sometimes it is difficult to tell what is the best thing to say or do. Let us examine some criteria that people use in distinguishing right from wrong.

Some people think, “What brings me pleasure is good, and what causes me pain is bad” or “If I get my own way, that is good; if I don’t, that is bad. A person who helps me to do what I want is my friend, a person who stands in my way is an enemy.” In other words, “I” am the judge of what is right and wrong, and the criterion is how something affects “me.” This is a normal way of thinking for very young children, but they grow out of it as they mature. When we find this kind of behavior in an adult, we realize that this person has the moral maturity of a selfish child. Unfortunately, many people think like this and make decisions not because something is right or wrong, but because of how it will benefit them or their group. If we think like this, it becomes easy to take the position that the end justifies the means: To achieve one’s goals, any means is justified. Such attitudes may affect the judgment of politicians. A nation often decides whether a policy or an event is good or bad by seeing whether it is in the nation’s interest. This is one of the chief causes of conflicts and wars. Can “I” be the criterion for deciding good and evil?

Another common criterion is whether an act pleases others. For example, a young child wants to please her parents. What is right and wrong is determined by what makes the parents happy or unhappy. As people grow older, they become concerned about how they appear in the eyes of their peer group and thus they follow the moral values of the group. There are two questions, though: What should we do if our parents or peers want us to do something we know is wrong? If no one sees what we are doing and no one will find out, will we still be good? There are certainly some people who would commit all kinds of crimes if they knew no one would see them and they would not be caught and punished. If this were the only motivation for not doing wrong, however, we would need a police officer on every street corner and everyone would need to watch everyone else. Are there not more noble motivations for one’s deeds?

Law-abiding citizens recognize that, in general, laws exist to protect people and maintain social order. Even if one thinks a law is wrong, it should still be followed, since willfully breaking a law weakens the whole social fabric. One’s duty, therefore, is to keep the law and respect one’s superiors. However, law cannot be the highest



standard of right and wrong, since we appeal to some higher authority when we say that a law is unjust. Laws should be based on justice, but they are not the source of justice. There have been unjust laws, and legal systems sometimes have been used for political purposes to eliminate opposition and stifle dissent. In such circumstances, is it one's duty to obey the law? These are not easy questions, and there are no easy answers, but such situations have arisen many times.

People who follow their conscience and the moral law within refuse to compromise their integrity by doing and saying what they know to be wrong, despite the suffering they will likely endure as a result.

Good and evil begin within oneself

Where do good and evil come from? Are people basically good or evil? We can discuss three different perspectives on this problem:

- ✗ Human nature is good.
- ✗ Human nature is evil.
- ✗ Human nature is both good and evil.

If we do something good or someone points out a good quality of ours, we are apt to take the credit for it. On the other hand, if we do something wrong or recognize some character defect, we tend to blame someone else for it. To realize that we are responsible for the quality of our character is a sign of a mature personality. To recognize that the origin of good and evil lies in

the human heart is the most profound insight. It means that we cannot blame other people for how we behave. Although we sometimes feel that another person has "made us angry," we are only trying to locate the source of our own problems in someone else. This can be very dangerous and even lead to murder.

Although there is undoubtedly evil around us, the greatest evil lies within us. It is also the only evil with which we can deal. Attempting to change others while we remain unchanged can have disastrous consequences. We are responsible in some way for our situations, and if we change ourselves our situation will change. Our focus should be on inner regeneration leading to outer transformation.

This was the discovery of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who spent many years in the labor camps and prisons of the Soviet Union.

It was granted to me to carry away from my prison years on my bent back, which nearly broke beneath its load, this essential experience: how a human being becomes evil and how good. In the intoxication of youthful successes I had felt myself to be infallible, and I was therefore cruel. In the surfeit of power I was a murderer, and an oppressor. In my most evil



moments I was convinced that I was doing good, and I was well supplied with systematic arguments. And it was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either — but right through every human heart — and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains ... an uprooted small corner of evil.

Since then I have come to understand the truth of all the religions of the world: They struggle with the evil inside a human being (inside every human being). It is impossible to expel evil from the world in its entirety, but it is possible to constrict it within each person.

And since that time I have come to understand the falsehood of all the revolutions in history. They destroy only those carriers of evil contemporary with them (and also fail, out of haste, to discriminate the carriers of good as well). And they take to themselves as their heritage the actual evil itself, magnified still more.

— Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*

Everyone is personally tainted by this kind of evil. There are no exceptions. Can anyone look back on his life with a completely clear conscience, without shame or regret for wrongs done, or for good deeds left undone? No people, nation or race can claim to be without sin, nor does any people or race have a monopoly on wrongdoing.

Is evil natural?

Sometimes people believe that it is not possible for goodness to exist without evil. Others think, “You can’t recognize goodness without the presence of evil.” However, let us consider this. A baby intuitively knows his mother is kind. He doesn’t need to be abused to recognize this. Children assume that all is good until they are painfully taught that evil exists. We know a delicious meal automatically. We don’t make our taste buds more sensitive by eating dirt before sitting down to lunch. Obviously we can recognize and enjoy something that is good without evil. Good and evil are not complements like light and dark, male and female. Instead, they actively oppose each other because they have contradictory purposes. They cannot co-exist forever, since they intend each other’s destruction. Still, if we have the right attitude, we can learn from both good and evil experiences.

In fact, evil is a distortion of good. Even something like love, which is good, can be misused and corrupted and thus become dangerous and destructive. Evil is parasitic, like a cancer on living tissue, or like organized crime on the legitimate economy. This is why Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest Christian philosophers of the Middle Ages, said, “Good can exist without evil, but evil cannot exist without good.”

Furthermore, evil appears to be limited to the human race. One of the qualities distinguishing human beings from animals is the capacity for good and evil. People have the potential to commit not only extraordinary acts of altruism and self-sacrifice, but also great evil. Man is perhaps the only being who fights and often tries to kill members of his *own* species. In the animal world, members of the same species do not generally fight each other to the death. The struggle within a species, such as the contest between stags, is for the purpose of deciding which is to be the leader of the herd. Once this is established, there is order again until the next challenge. They do not try to kill each other. When there are disputes over territory, for example, it usually becomes clear after a while which animal is the stronger. The vanquished animal slinks away and is not pursued. The main struggle in the animal world, the battle between a predator and its prey, results from natural instinct. Animals usually kill other animals (which are almost invariably of a different species) for food, either for an immediate meal or for a future one. It is only man who engages in the wholesale slaughter of his own kind.

This struggle between people is not constructive. The wars that have ravaged the human race have been enormously wasteful and debilitating in terms of lives lost, capital destroyed and cultural and moral resources diminished. Whole civilizations have been worn down and eventually destroyed by internal and external conflict.

How can we tell good from evil?

Relativism

Are good and evil relative, or are there absolute values? As we become more and more aware of the different lifestyles and opinions that exist in the world, it is easy to think that good and evil are just a matter of opinion. Long ago, Aristotle noted, “Fire burns both in Hellas and in Persia; but men’s ideas of right and wrong vary from place to place.” Although they may vary, right and wrong are still recognizable everywhere.

While it is important to recognize that there is a diversity of opinions, this doesn’t mean that moral statements are mere opinion. If this were so, we would have no right to judge others and hold each other accountable for behavior that reflects common values. There have always been universal moral attitudes and actions. The reading below, “Virtues and Vices,” shows this very clearly. There has never been a society that extolled cowardice as a virtue, or rape, murder and theft as noble deeds. Although courage and honor may take different forms in different societies, both are universal virtues.

Almost everyone thinks certain crimes are wrong in some absolute sense. Would we really want to inhabit a moral universe that says that child sacrifice is allowable, that Nazi morality is no worse than Christian morality, that we cannot complain if we are treated unjustly because that is merely our opinion and our opinion is no more worthy than that of our oppressor? Such a world would be intolerable. This is why people search for a standard of good and evil that transcends personal opinion and can be recognized objectively by everyone.

Before we consider some of these moral theories, let us examine relativism in a little more detail. One version of relativism states that there is no such thing as truth. Every moral perspective is just a matter of opinion. But this also means that the theory of relativism itself is only an opinion and need not be taken seriously! It is impossible to say there is no such thing as truth unless one admits that there is at least one truth. To see how problematic the theory is, take a strip of paper. On one side write, “*The sentence on the other side of this piece of paper is not correct.*” On the other side write, “*The sentence on the other side is correct.*” Which side is right?

Absolutism

This is the view that there are certain rules that are absolutely valid and binding on everyone. The right thing to do is to obey the law irrespective of the consequences. However, there are problems with this approach. Consider the commandment against stealing. Is it always wrong to steal? Suppose that a person through no fault of his own is starving. Is he entitled to take some food from someone who has plenty? It is generally accepted in religious ethics that in such a situation a person has the right to take enough food to feed himself. This is because human life is more valuable than property.

This does not justify stealing in other situations. Just because there is an occasional exception to a rule does not mean that the rule can be broken capriciously. If a mother and her child are poor and hungry, most would agree that stealing a loaf of bread should earn much less punishment, if any at all, than a thief who steals the same bread because he cannot be bothered to pay or thinks he is entitled to other people's possessions. Both the circumstances and the motivation are vastly different in each case.

One of the dangers of moral absolutism is that we are unable to make judicious distinctions between stealing a loaf of bread because one is starving, and stealing a car because one doesn't want to obtain it through honest work.

Again, suppose there is a person I do not like. I do the "right thing" by telling the truth when a local thug asks me where he is. Is it my fault in any way if he is beaten up? Does motivation play a part in deciding whether an action is right or wrong?

Motivation

Motivation is an important factor in deciding whether an action is moral or immoral. If one does the right thing for the wrong reason, is it good? For example, suppose I give someone a present because I want her to do something for me. Or I give money to a beggar so that I feel good. In these cases I would have an ulterior motive for what I was doing. I would be doing something good for the reward I am expecting to get. I am doing good not for its own sake or the sake of the person for whom the deed is done, but for my own benefit. Of course, it is generally true that we are more likely to do good when we are rewarded, but this should be only incidental and not the main motivation.

It is important not only to do what is right, but also to do it for the right reason, or to have the right motivation. A pure motivation is one that is untainted by selfishness. The word for this is "altruism," doing something for another person without expecting to be rewarded. For example, suppose a woman wishes to marry a rich man. Does she love him or his money? It is sometimes hard to be clear about our motivations for doing or desiring certain things. This is why when we do something for a person with the aim of getting him to do something that we desire, when he doesn't do it we feel angry and resentful. This shows us clearly that what we gave to the person was not primarily for his benefit. If it had been, we would have been happy with his happiness alone. Goodness is its own reward.

Where do goodness and evil lie? They do not exist in the outside world, but within oneself. Everything starts from you as an individual. If you are doing things for the sake of others, you may be called good. However beautiful a song you may sing for someone, if you are doing that out of an insatiable desire to be praised, your motivation is not pure and your deed is less than absolutely good. If you do things out of arrogance, out of pride in yourself, you are not quite doing things right. Arrogance has nothing to do with goodness. Even though we may do what appears to be a very good act, it is the motivation that determines if an act is truly good or evil.

Being good means that you must see things more for the sake of others than for

your own sake. You should listen attentively for the sake of other people, not for yourself. You should speak, act, and use all five senses for the sake of others, not for yourself. If you found anyone living like that, you probably would long to be with that person and would feel great affection toward him or her.

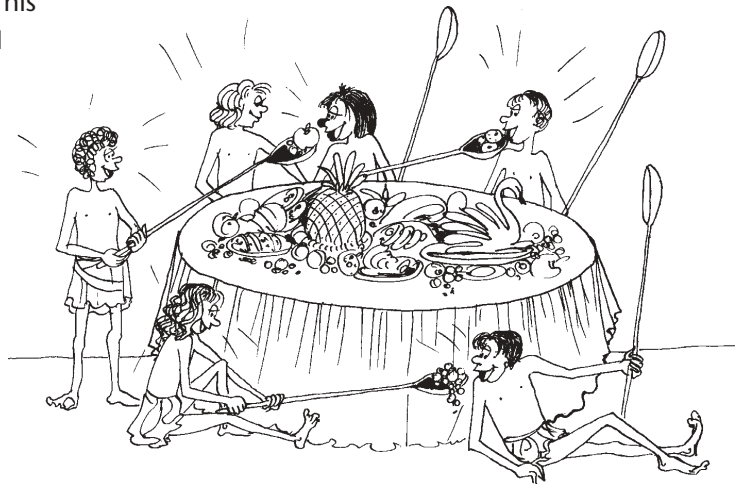


In Ireland there is a legend about a monk who died and went to heaven. At the gate to heaven he met St. Peter. "Before I enter," he said to St. Peter, "I would like you to take me on a tour of hell." St. Peter found a guide to take the monk to hell. When he got there, he was astonished to see a great table piled high with the choicest foods. But the people in hell were starving. The monk turned to his guide and raised his eyebrows.

The guide explained. "Everybody who comes here is given a spoon five feet long, and is required to hold it at the end to eat. But you just can't eat with a spoon five feet long if you hold it at the end. Look at them. They miss their mouths every time."

The monk agreed that this was hell indeed and asked to be taken back to heaven immediately. In heaven, to his surprise, he saw a similar room, with a similar table laden with very choice foods. But the people were radiantly happy.

The monk turned to his guide. "No spoons, I suppose?" he asked. "Oh yes," said the guide, "they have the same spoons, the same length, and they must hold them at the end just as in hell. But you see, the people who came here want to feed each other."



Consequences

Another thing to consider in deciding whether an action is good or not is its consequences. John Stuart Mill, an English philosopher of the 19th century, founded a branch of moral thinking called utilitarianism. He thought that since everyone desires happiness and wants to avoid pain, a good action is one that leads to the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. While this sounds simple enough in theory, it is difficult to practice. When a murderer is punished, does this lead to an increase in happiness? It may be that the happiness of many people that

he is punished outweighs his unhappiness at being incarcerated. But what if an unpopular person is unjustly imprisoned? In this case we can see that the happiness principle by itself is not a reliable guide to judging what is right and wrong.

It is also impossible to know all the consequences of one's actions *ad infinitum*. Suppose as a doctor you saved the life of a young boy. Was your action good or bad? Perhaps he will grow up to become a mass murderer. In hindsight, was saving his young life right or wrong?

Despite the limitations of the theory, it is still important to take into consideration the consequences of one's actions. For example, is sex outside marriage right or wrong? Before making a decision that can influence your whole future, it is wise to consider the possible consequences — whether the joy of intimacy will outweigh possible feelings of shame and guilt, emotional burden, and the risk of disease or an unwanted pregnancy.

Universality

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant developed “the categorical imperative” when considering the morality of decisions. He said that we should do something only if we are prepared for everyone else to be able to do it as well. In other words, act as if the way you act were a universal law. Kant did not tell people what they should or should not do. Instead, he provided a general principle by which to make moral decisions. For example, is it ever morally right to tell a lie? Is it good that everyone be permitted to tell lies? If my decision should not or cannot be universalized as a general moral principle, then it is morally wrong to tell lies.

This approach has the benefit of ignoring consequences. Thus it is always wrong to punish an innocent person, even if by so doing other people can be deterred from committing crimes. However, there are times when two rules may coincide. For example, if it is always wrong to break a promise and always wrong to tell a lie, what happens when I have to tell a lie to keep a promise? Suppose I promise a friend that I will hide him from a murderer, and the murderer later asks me where my friend is. How am I to reply? If I tell the truth, I break a promise; if I keep the promise, I must tell a lie. Kant's theory leads to stalemate in such cases, and appeal must be made to some higher sense of right and wrong.

In this case, exceptions have to be introduced. For example, if I learn that a friend has purchased poison and intends to kill his girlfriend, it is perfectly reasonable for me to steal the poison to prevent him from harming her. Why is stealing permitted in this situation? I would wish that everyone would behave in the same way in the same circumstances. This reasoning, though, has the danger of leading to *ad hoc* justifications.

Good and bad character

Another way to discuss good and bad is in terms of character. A person of good character usually doesn't spend a lot of time agonizing over whether something is good or bad. He often just knows intuitively. Aristotle said that the aim or purpose of human life is to develop the virtues that make up a good character. A virtuous person acts and behaves in the appropriate way at all times, naturally being good and doing good.

Aristotle listed twelve moral virtues that fall between two vices: the vice of excess and the vice of deficiency. For example, the virtue of courage would fall between its excess (which is foolhardiness) and its deficiency (which is cowardice). As we grow up, we learn to cultivate such virtues so as to be able to conduct ourselves with dignity. For example, if my car breaks down, I have the natural capacity to get angry. However, my attitude toward the feeling of anger is important. I could just release my anger and kick the car and smash the engine with a hammer. On the other hand, I

could get depressed and just abandon the car. Neither is a mature response. The right response would be to control my anger and channel it to motivate me to get the car fixed.

The Roman philosopher Cicero consolidated moral theory in the classical world and distinguished four primary virtues:

- ✗ **Courage:** A courageous person is able to conquer his fear and anxiety, whether it is caused by physical danger or by the challenge to face the truth.
- ✗ **Justice:** A just person treats people fairly in the way they deserve, without personal sentiment or malice.
- ✗ **Temperance:** This is the virtue of controlling what can be controlled and not attempting to control what cannot be controlled. A temperate person has a quietness of mind that allows him to concentrate and be balanced.
- ✗ **Wisdom:** A wise person knows himself, yet is not self-centered; sees life in proportion and therefore does not waste it on trivialities; knows when he can help and cannot help; and is able to discern what is going on in the world because he is not concerned with personal gain.

To these four were added by Christian thinkers what are known as the three theological virtues.

- ✗ **Faith** is continuing to believe what your reason tells you to be true despite your changing moods and the changing circumstances.
- ✗ **Hope** is the confidence that comes from knowing that God is active despite apparent problems and dangers.
- ✗ **Love** is giving oneself for the happiness and well-being of another.

Christianity also has elaborated a series of vices that have come to be known popularly as the seven deadly sins.



- ✗ **Pride** is sinful when a person thinks that because his work is good, he is good. This does not mean one shouldn't have pride in one's work or self-respect. A proud man wants to be honored and praised by others. If he is not, he may start to feel envy.
- ✗ **Envy** is a selfish and malevolent emotion that we may feel toward those we consider inferior but who, for some reason, appear to be better off than we are. We are not happy at their good fortune, and are secretly glad when misfortune strikes them.
- ✗ **Anger** is a strong feeling of displeasure or hostility, often provoked by having one's will thwarted. It distorts a person's perspective and when

uncontrolled may cause him to commit terrible crimes.

- ✗ **Sloth** is the constant desire for rest and sleep. A lazy person tries to avoid all physical exertion and tries to understand things without making any mental effort.

- ✕ **Avarice** is the desire to get and keep things for oneself.
- ✕ **Gluttony** is the desire for more food than one needs. After overeating a glutton feels heavy and mentally dull.
- ✕ **Lust** is the uncontrolled passion for physical sexuality separated from sexuality's spiritual dimension. Lust fills a person's mind with sexual thoughts, corrupting and distorting his way of looking at others.

We have discussed different approaches to understanding what is good and what is evil. Perhaps the most important conclusion is that evil cannot be considered natural or relative, and also that both goodness and evil start within ourselves and not somewhere outside ourselves. It is up to us, to the extent that we are able, to overcome evil and to multiply goodness.

We have also discussed different theories that distinguish between good and evil. As we see, each theory has valuable points, but none is adequate by itself. They complement each other. In order to make the right decision in a situation of moral choice, one needs to take into consideration one's motives, the action itself and its consequences; and in order for one's vision to be clear, it is necessary to become a virtuous person. This is the way to gradually overcome evil — first within oneself and thus by example and extension in the world around one.



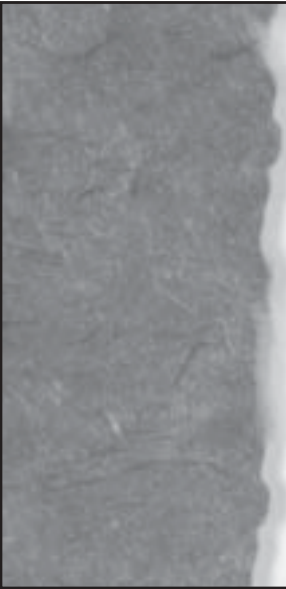
Virtues and Vices

From The Islamic Way of Life,
by Abul A'La Maududi

Moral sense is inborn in man, and through the ages it has served as the common man's standard of moral behavior, approving certain qualities and disapproving others. While this instinctive faculty may vary from person to person, human conscience has given a more or less uniform verdict in favor of certain moral qualities as being good and declared others as bad. On the side of moral virtues, justice, courage, bravery and truthfulness have always elicited praise, and history does not record any period worth the name in which falsehood, injustice, dishonesty and breach of trust may have been upheld; fellow-feeling, compassion, fidelity, and magnanimity have always been valued while selfishness, cruelty, miserliness and bigotry have never received the approbation of human society; men have always appreciated perseverance, determination and courage and have never approved of impatience, capriciousness, cowardice and imbecility. Dignity, restraint, politeness, and amiability have throughout the ages been counted among virtues, whereas snobbery, misbehavior and rudeness have never found recognition as good moral qualities. Persons having a sense of responsibility and devotion to duty have always won the highest regard of men; never have people who are incompetent, slothful and lacking in sense of duty been looked upon with approval. Similarly, in respect of the standard of good and bad in the collective behavior of society as a whole, the verdict has always been almost unanimous.

Only that society has been looked upon as worthy of honor and respect which possesses the virtues of organization, discipline, mutual affection and fellow-feeling and has established a social order based on justice, freedom and equality of men. As opposed to this, disorganization, indiscipline, anarchy, disunity, injustice and social imbalance have always been considered as manifestations of decay and disintegration in a society. Robbery, murder, larceny, adultery, fraud and graft have always been condemned. Slandering, scandal-mongering and blackmailing have never been considered as wholesome social activities.

Contrary to this, service and care of the aged, help of one's kith and kin, regard for neighbors, loyalty to friends, assistance to the weak, the destitute and orphans, and nursing the sick are qualities which have always been highly valued ever since the dawn of civilization. Virtuous, polite, mild and sincere persons have always been welcomed. Individuals who are upright, honest, sincere, outspoken and dependable, whose deeds conform to their words, who are content with their own rightful possession, who are prompt in the discharge of their obligations to others, who live in peace and let others live in peace and from whom nothing but good can be expected, have always formed the core of any healthy human society.



This passage above shows that human moral standards are in fact universal and have been well known to humankind throughout the ages. Good and evil are not myths to be hunted out. They are well-known realities and are equally well understood by all. The sense of good and evil is inherent in the very nature of humans. Hence in the terminology of the Koran virtue is called "*Ma'roof*" (a well-known thing) and evil is designated as "*Munkar*" (an unknown thing); that is to say virtue is known to be desirable for everyone and evil is not known to commend itself in any way. This fact is mentioned by the Koran when it says:

"God has revealed to human nature the consciousness and cognition of good and evil."

— Surah 91:8

CHAPTER 23

The Holocaust

In the ancient Near East it was common for the leader of a community, who was often a priest, to make a confession of the sins of the whole community. While doing this he would hold his hands over a live animal, normally a goat. It was believed that the sins that were confessed were passed to the goat. The goat symbolically took on the sins and the guilt for the sins. The goat was then killed, and the sins and guilt were considered destroyed with it.

More recently the term “scapegoat” has come to mean a person or group of people who are singled out to blame when things are going badly. Often this person or group is different from everyone else in some way. In July 64 AD, when a rumor arose that Emperor Nero had started the fire that destroyed much of Rome, the worried Nero tried to shift the blame onto a religious sect called the Christians, thus initiating a period of bloody persecution and martyrdom. He singled out the Christians because they were new and many strange rumors about their lifestyle were circulating. For example, Christians met secretly for a communal meal, called *agape* or “love feast.” While their practice was based on brotherly love, rumors began to emerge that they were practicing sexual orgies in dark and secret places. Another story distorted the Christian tradition of consuming bread and wine, which symbolized Christ’s body and blood, as a practice of cannibalism – the consuming of real flesh and blood.

Throughout history similar events have recurred with different groups. In this chapter we examine in more detail what has come to be called the Holocaust, the most horrific example of the attempt to make a whole people a scapegoat and to blame them for the troubles of a nation.

Adolf Hitler, the leader of Germany from 1933 to 1945, made the Jews scapegoats to be blamed for Germany’s economic collapse following the nation’s defeat in the First World War.

During the 1930s the German government had printed extra money to pay its debts. This led to such terrible inflation that a wheelbarrow full of money was needed to buy a loaf of bread. People’s savings were depleted and many prominent families were reduced to poverty. Hitler convinced those who were willing to be convinced, that the economic crisis was the fault of the Jews, who had formed a conspiracy to ruin and control the country. If the Jews could be eradicated (as many thought they deserved to be), everything that was preventing national success would be eliminated.

The word “holocaust” originally meant “whole burnt offering” but has come to refer to the mass murder and near destruction of the Jews in Europe by Hitler’s Nazi regime during the Second World War. During the years of Nazi rule in Europe, an attempt was made to deliberately destroy the Jewish people. Over a few years, six million Jews were killed simply because they were Jewish.



How could this happen? The Nazis believed that they were members of the Aryan “master race” which was destined to rule the world. They were entitled to purify the world of “subhumans” such as the Jews. Jews were said to be contaminating the purity of the German nation. The Nazis convinced people that the Jews controlled the economy and were the source of all Germany’s problems.

Thus, the mass destruction of Jews, and the elimination of their music, religion, history, and traditions, became the state policy of Hitler’s regime. Even during some of the most difficult periods of the war, trains that were needed for defense were diverted to the transportation of Jews to extermination camps.

Three months after Hitler came to power in January 1933, he organized the first concentration camp in Dachau. He filled it with all those who opposed the Nazi regime, such as communists,

Social Democrats and religious minorities such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses. New laws deprived Jews of their legal and economic rights. Jews had to wear badges with a Star of David to reveal their identity. In a far-reaching propaganda campaign designed to isolate the Jewish community, many lies were circulated. Children at schools were taught that Jews were enemies of the German nation; books and music by Jews were burned. Some citizens fought for the right of their city to have a signboard at the gates saying, “Judenfrei” (free of Jews). New and humiliating laws were issued, according to which many Jews, including Albert Einstein, were deprived of their German citizenship. Mobs attacked Jewish businesses and synagogues and beat up and murdered Jews.

The war started in 1939, and in January 1942 Adolf Eichmann made public his plans for “the ultimate solution to the Jewish problem” — the extermination of all 14 million Jews living in Europe. Part of this plan included the creation of death camps such as Auschwitz, Birkenau, Ravensbrück and Treblinka, where tens of thousands of Jews could be destroyed every day. In accordance with this plan, Jews from all the occupied countries were brought to the concentration camps in sealed, overcrowded cattle wagons, in which many died from hunger, disease and suffocation before they ever reached the camps.

This prayer was found scribbled on a piece of wrapping paper near the body of a dead child at Ravensbrück concentration camp.

O, Lord,
remember not only the men and women of
good will,
but also those of evil will.
But do not remember all the suffering they
have inflicted upon us;
remember the fruits we have borne thanks to
this suffering —
our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility,
our courage, our generosity,
the greatness of heart
which has grown out of all this;
and when they come to the judgment,
let all the fruits that we have borne
be their forgiveness.

When the people arrived at a camp they were divided into groups. The old, the sick and small children were sent straight to their deaths in gas chambers. The others were expected to do heavy labor for twelve hours a day on a very poor diet. When they became too weak to work, they too were gassed. Enormous furnaces kept burning 24 hours a day were used to dispose of the bodies.

As the German armies invaded and occupied Europe, more and more Jews came under their control and were rounded up. Many Jews in the Soviet Union did not escape such a fate. In the occupied cities, the Nazis confined Jews to walled neighborhoods, called ghettos, in which all Jews were required to live. Later, the entire population of the ghetto could be killed. In Kiev, in the ditch called Babi Yar, 34,000 Jewish men, women and children were murdered in 1941. Before the end of the war the Nazis tried to hide what they had done, but the enormity of their crimes could not be hidden. One-third of all the Jews in the world had been murdered.

Those who knew what was right

Perhaps the most puzzling issue for us today is the question “How could other human beings have allowed millions of people to be shot, burned, and poisoned in the gas chambers? Could the fascists really have concealed their crimes so well that nobody could guess what was happening? And if people knew, couldn’t they do anything?”

In general, the Jews received very little support. The Allied nations restricted emigration and did not do as much as they could have done. Although many people were aware of what was happening, they said nothing and did nothing. They felt as if what was happening did not concern them. The Protestant clergyman Martin Niemöller summed it up:

In Germany, the Nazis came for the Communists and I didn’t speak up because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Jews and I did not speak up because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then

they came for the Catholics and I was a Protestant, so I didn’t speak up. Then they came for me ... by that time there was no one to speak up for anyone.



There were a few courageous individuals who did provide help, often at great personal risk. Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat, arranged for Swedish passports to be printed and distributed to members of the Jewish community. Through his action about 30,000 people were saved from the gas chambers. He was later accused of

In 1994 Steven Spielberg made the movie *Schindler's List*, which is based on actual events. This movie tells about Oskar Schindler, a German member of the Nazi party who during the war saved 759 Polish Jews from death.

Due to one person, 759 people destined to die were given life — the opportunity to feel joy and sorrow, to look at the sun and the stars, to raise children and grandchildren. By now six thousand people owe their lives to Oskar Schindler — that's the number of the descendants of those whom he saved during the war.

being a spy, and is thought to have perished in a Soviet labor camp. In Jerusalem there is a street where a tree is planted in the memory of each person who helped the Jews during the years of the Holocaust. But behind the thousands who were saved, millions were murdered.

During the years of the Nazi regime, it was considered normal to hate Jews. The mass media, teachers and professors, people in the streets, family members — all supported the official policy regarding the Jews. Under such circumstances it was not hard to doubt one's own moral principles, to have the courage to resist such social pressure and in spite of everything still follow the voice of conscience, to defend those who were persecuted. Difficult, but still possible.

Could it happen again?

For many years historians have looked for answers to this question. And only one thing is clear: Humanity was not prepared for the fact that such events could occur in the modern world.

Surely such savagery belonged to an earlier time, to uncivilized peoples. People who saw it coming couldn't believe it. And when they did realize what was happening, it was too late.

Those who managed to live through the horrors of the Holocaust thought that humanity would never forget this lesson. But only a few decades have passed, and in many countries again the same problems are appearing: alienation, intolerance, and the persecution of those who think or look different. Again, most people just passively observe, failing to recognize the danger. The following question was raised by Mikhail Gefter in April 1994 at the Moscow conference "Lessons of the Holocaust and Present-day Russia":

Fascism is a problem not only of yesterday but today as well. Under what conditions do fascists become a force so dominating, imposing itself and finding support by sympathy and fear, that it can bring devastating changes into our life?

For even if we ourselves don't take part in the persecution of those who are different from us, we often allow it by our indifference. Are we ready to recognize the beginning of fascism, including that being born in our own hearts?

Nazism was not the product of an uncultured society. Germany is famous for its culture, its education system, its poets and scientists. Fascist ideology was not developed and accepted by illiterate barbarians, but by well-educated people. Nor was it only a few madmen like Hitler and Eichmann who were to blame. In Germany alone there were 700,000 members of the SS who were charged with carrying out the Final Solution. Over a million people worked on the railways along which the Jews were transported, and countless others were involved in one way or another. After a day devoted to the extermination of prisoners, a camp commandant might go home and spend the evening reading Schiller or Goethe or even going to the opera. Just because one is an intellectual doesn't mean one is morally superior to others. An intellectual, on the contrary, is more responsible because he should know better.

There was an American school principal who used to send each new teacher who came to his school the following letter:

Dear teacher,

I am a survivor of a concentration camp.
My eyes saw what no man should witness:
gas chambers built by learned engineers
children poisoned by learned physicians
infants killed by trained nurses
women and babies shot and burned by high school
and college graduates
so, I am suspicious of education.
My request is: help your students become human.
Your efforts must never produce learned monsters,
skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns.
Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if
they serve to make our children more human.

Just think for a moment: If at the very beginning of fascism more people had had the inner strength to oppose, instead of following blindly, ideas that seemed so attractive; instead of submitting themselves to the voice of the crowd — instead of silently observing the development of an anti-human ideology — then perhaps the horrors of World War II never would have happened.

That is why we have no right to forget the past — for the sake of the present and the future.

Something to
think about



- How do groups of people or individuals become isolated from the rest of society?
- Why did ordinary people participate — either actively, as members of the army or camp officials, or passively, as bystanders?
- When it might cost them their very lives, many Jews remained faithful to their religion. Why was that?
- Could the same thing happen again? Could it happen here?
- Why were the countries that knew what was happening so unwilling to help?

"Babi Yar"

by Anatoly Kusnetsov

From an article in the magazine *Youth*, Moscow, 1966

Here is the story of a woman, a mother of two children, an actress in the Kiev Puppet Theatre, Dina Mironovna Pronicheva. I am presenting it in the way she told it, without adding or changing anything:

All the Jews of Kiev and the vicinity must come on Monday, September 29, 1941, at 8 a.m. to the corner of Melnikovskaya and Dochturovskaya Streets. Bring documents, money, valuables, warm clothes, underwear, etc.

Jews who disobey this order and are found in some other place will be shot.

Citizens who break into Jews' flats and take the things left behind will be shot.

Many people were walking along Turgenevskaya Street, but Artyom Street was really crowded. People with sacks, baby carriages, various kinds of carts, sometimes even trucks, were standing, moving a bit, stopping again. The noise of the crowd was very loud and it looked like a demonstration, but without flags, orchestras or celebration.

Like many others, Dina thought there was a train in front. Some shots were heard nearby. A plane was circling low in the sky, and the atmosphere was one of anxiety and panic.

Fragments of conversation in the crowd could be overheard:

"It's the war, the war! They are taking us to some other place where it is safer."

"But why only Jews?"

Some half-witted old woman was uttering absolute nonsense:

"It's because they are a nation related to Germans. So they are being taken away first..."

Pushing through the crowd, Dina worried more and more. Then she saw that the people in front were putting their things aside. Clothes, sacks and suitcases to the left, food to the right. And the Germans sent them ahead in groups: first one group, then a pause, then the next group. "Count them, count. ... Stop!" They usually let a line of a dozen pass.

Dina was afraid. This was nothing like a railway station. She did not know what it was yet, but she felt that it was not an evacuation. Anything but an evacuation.

What was especially strange were those machine-gun bursts. She still could not allow herself to think it was shooting. Firstly, why such a great mass of people? It couldn't be. But then — why?

The city was quiet. Everybody seemed stupefied as they walked between the lines of fascists on both sides. In front they saw lines of soldiers with dogs on leashes. Dina heard behind her: "Children, help me to pass, I am blind."

She took the old man by the waist and they walked together.

"Where are they taking us, Grandfather?" she asked.

“Child,” he said, “we are going to pay our last debt to God.”

At that moment they entered a path between two lines of soldiers and dogs. The path was narrow, about a meter and a half. The soldiers were standing shoulder to shoulder, their sleeves rolled up, all of them holding rubber clubs or big sticks. They rained blows down on those passing.

It was impossible to hide or duck. Cruel blows fell on their heads, shoulders and backs from the right and from the left . . .

The dazed people stumbled to an area encircled by troops. It was something like a grass-covered square. All the grass was covered with underwear, shoes, and clothes.

The police grabbed people rudely, beat them and shouted: “Undress! Quickly! Quickly!”

Drunk with anger and in a sadistic rage, they kicked and beat with clubs those who were too slow.

Of course, it was done so that a crowd couldn’t form. There were many naked people covered with blood.

Dina says some people were laughing hysterically, and she saw the hair of several people go completely gray during the time they undressed and went to be shot.

The naked people were arranged in small lines and taken to the ditch dug in the steep sandy wall. Nobody saw what happened, only shooting was heard.

Mothers were fussing over their children. Sometimes a German policeman angrily grabbed a child and threw him over the wall like a piece of wood. ...

The wall was on the left. On the right was a ditch. The ledge must have been dug especially for the shooting. It was so narrow that people instinctively pressed themselves to the sandy wall in order not to fall down.

Dina looked down and was dizzy; it seemed to her very deep. Below her was a sea of bloody bodies. On the opposite side of the ditch she managed to see the machine-guns and several German soldiers. ...

Dina did not see but felt the bodies fall down from the ledge, and that the bullets were approaching her. She thought, “Now ... now ...” Without waiting, she clenched her fists and jumped into the ditch.



CHAPTER 24

Islam: The Life of Muhammad

Islam is one of the largest and most influential of the world's religions. Its adherents live mostly in the Middle East, Northern Africa, Central Asia, Malaysia and Indonesia. Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world. Today more than one billion people around the world profess the Islamic faith.

Islam is an Arabic word which means "submission," "surrender" or "obedience." Another meaning of the word is "peace." It stands for "the perfect peace that comes when one's life is surrendered to God." The person who accepts Islam is called a Muslim. He believes that submission and obedience to the will of God is the only way that real peace can ever be achieved in the heart and mind of a person, and in society as a whole.

Islam can be considered the brother religion of Judaism and Christianity, since all three have Abraham as their common father of faith. Hence, both the history and the message of Islam cannot be distinguished as fully distinct from those of its two "elder brothers." Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam is "a religion of the Book." For Jews the book is the Torah; for Christians, the Bible; and for Muslims, the Koran — the collected revelations that Muhammad received from God.

The lineage of Islam

For Muslims, the story of Islam does not begin with Muhammad but with God. "In the beginning God ..." opens the book of Genesis in the Bible. The story of the creation of the world in the Koran closely resembles the Genesis account. It differs only in using the word "Allah," which is formed by joining the definite article "al" (meaning "the") with "Illah" (God). Literally, "Allah" means "the God" — not "a God," for there is only one: The God.

Allah created the world, and after it He created man. The first man was the prophet Adam. His task was to look after the world in the way that God wanted it to be looked after. However, Adam gave in to the temptation of Satan and with Eve was cast out of Paradise. Eventually, Adam and Eve repented and were reconciled to God. In gratitude they built a simple shrine, the Kaaba. A descendant of Adam, Noah, had a son named Shem. His name is the origin of the word "Semite." Thus both Arabs and Jews, as descendants of Shem, are Semitic people.

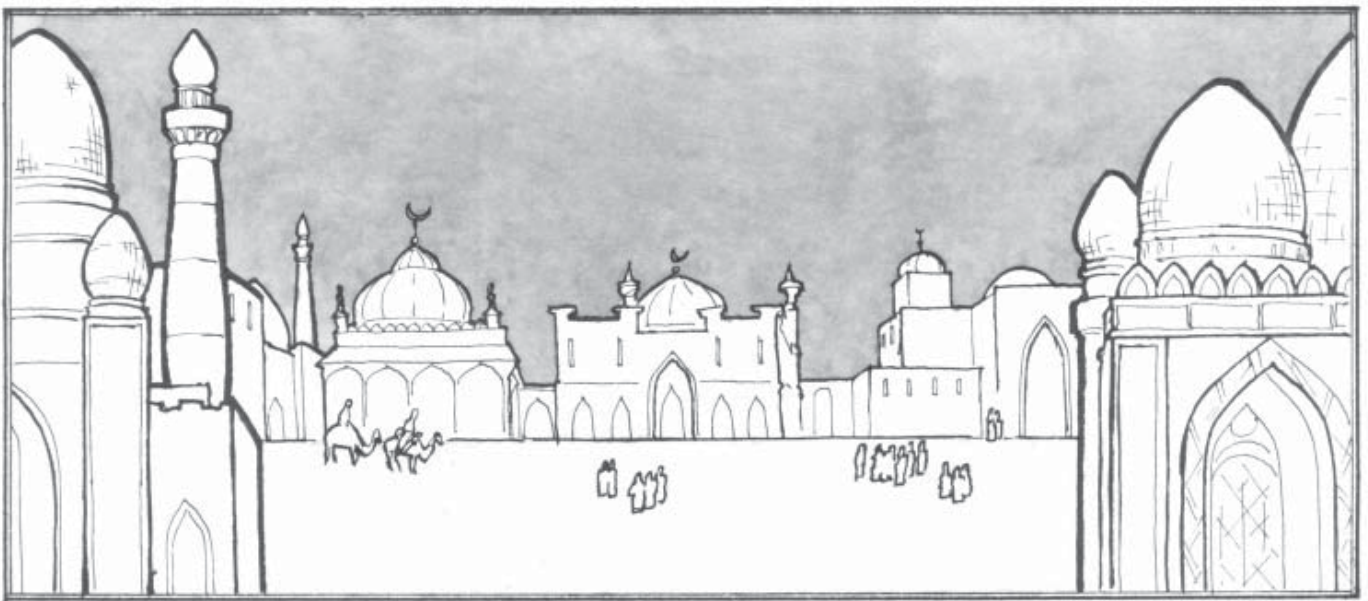
The Prophet Abraham, a descendant of Shem, lived with his childless wife, Sarah, and her maid Hagar. Wanting to continue his lineage, Abraham had a son by Hagar. He was called Ishmael. Later, Sarah too had a son, who was called Isaac. Abraham was instructed by God to sacrifice Isaac. It was the submission of Abraham to this supreme test, described in the Koran by the verb "*aslama*," that appears to have given Islam its name. Sarah then demanded that Abraham banish Ishmael and Hagar from the tribe. According to the Koran, Ishmael went to Mecca, and together with his

father, Abraham, rebuilt the Kaaba, the sacred shrine of Islam. Ishmael's descendants, growing up in Arabia, became Arabs, whereas those of Isaac, who remained in Palestine, are Jews.

Following the lineage of Ishmael, the first son of Abraham, we eventually come to the second half of the sixth century AD and Muhammad, the prophet through whom Islam emerged in its final form.

Muhammad's birth and childhood

The period in Arabia before the call of Muhammad is often called by Islamic scholars "the days of ignorance." It was a particularly uncivilized and barbaric time. Arabia stood isolated, cut off from the rest of the world by vast tracts of desert. The people who lived in the desert, the Bedouins, felt almost no obligation to anyone outside their tribe. There was a shortage of material goods, and the fighting character of the tribes made robbery and brigandage the normal way of life. There was no law except the law of the strongest. Whatever notions they had of morals, culture and



civilization were primitive in the extreme. Blood feuds sometimes stretched over half a century. Drunken orgies ending in bloody brawls were common. The gambling tables were open all night, and dancing girls inflamed the passions of the young men from the desert. The dominant religion was animism, the worship of stones, trees, idols, stars and spirits. There is no evidence that they inspired any genuine religious enthusiasm and, even less, moral conduct. The time was ripe for a deliverer.

The Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca around 570 AD, a member of the Hashim clan of the Quraish tribe. According to Ibn Isha Q, an Islamic historian, the legend told of an angel approaching the Prophet's Mother during her pregnancy: "You are pregnant with the lord of this people, and when he is born say, 'I put him in the care of the One, away from the evil of every envier; then call him Muhammad (highly praised).'" The legend also says that Muhammad's birth was revealed to the Jewish community of his time through the movement of the stars, and to the Christian community through the hermit Bahira.

At this time, the people of Arabia were mainly superstitious pagans, with a few notable exceptions such as Muhammad's grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib. Many Arabs lived as nomads, and there were only a few cities, such as Mecca, Yathrib and Taif. Mecca was a wealthy trading post that also happened to be the most important shrine for Arab idols. The cube-shaped Kaaba temple at the center of Mecca origi-

nally had been dedicated to the One True God. But over the centuries various cults moved in, and by the time of Muhammad there were no less than 360 idols to different gods inside the Kaaba.

Muhammad's early life was filled with tragedy. His father, a merchant, died a few days before he was born, and his mother died when he was only six years old. He was brought up by his grandfather, a man famous for his saintly life. Muhammad grew up a particularly devout and honorable man and a believer in the One God. When his grandfather died, Muhammad was taken into the household of his uncle, Abu Talib, who was a merchant. He worked for his uncle first as a shepherd and later as a merchant. He was well liked and earned the nickname "the trustworthy one" for his piety, honesty, fair dealing, and practical common sense.

When he was twenty-five, he entered the service of a wealthy widow named Khadijah. His wisdom and integrity impressed her greatly, and after a short while she offered herself in marriage to him. Although she was fifteen years older than Muhammad, they were very happily married and had six children. Even though polygamy was normal among Arabs at this time, Muhammad never considered marrying any other woman while she was alive. During the difficult times that lay ahead, Khadijah remained steadfast at his side. "Allah comforted him through her," tradition says, "for she made his burden light."

Muhammad was now rich, a respected and influential citizen of Mecca, and seemed to have reached his goal in life. But he was not satisfied by material security. Questions about the way of the world oppressed him. He was restless and increasingly withdrew from business and family and sought the solitude of the desert. It was there that the event occurred that was to change his life and to affect the history of the world.

The religious quest

There was a huge barren rock on the outskirts of Mecca known as Mount Hira, in which there was a cave. In search of solitude and a place where he could deeply meditate about the mysteries of good and evil, Muhammad found refuge in that cave. He was unable to accept the crudeness, superstition and evil environment that was considered normal, and he reached out for God. Through many sleepless nights of prayer and meditation, Muhammad became more and more convinced that Allah was as real as life and the universe He created, and far greater than any of his countrymen had ever supposed. He was what His name literally meant, the God, One without rival.

One night, when he was around forty years old, something happened that changed his life entirely. He became aware of the presence of an angel, and he was shown words and commanded to read. "I cannot read," replied a terrified Muhammad. According to the Koran (96:1-5) the angel insisted, and suddenly Muhammad knew what the words said:

Read! Read! Read in the name of your Lord, He who created and made
man from an embryo. Read, for your Lord is merciful like no one on earth.
He who instructed man by pen, He taught him what he did not know.

Coming out of his trance with the words written on his soul, Muhammad left the cave. He then heard a voice from heaven saying, "Muhammad, you are God's messenger and I am Gabriel."

Muhammad rushed home and told his wife he had either become a prophet or a madman. After hearing the full story, Khadijah became his first convert, a fact that speaks for itself, as no one knows a man as well as his own wife. But was this voice

really God's? Would it return again, and what would it require? Muhammad wondered. It was two years before the messages began again, and they continued for the rest of his life. He was chosen to preach the words of God with unyielding determination, in the face of relentless persecution, insult and outrage.

Not once did I receive a revelation without thinking that my soul had been torn away.

Hadith

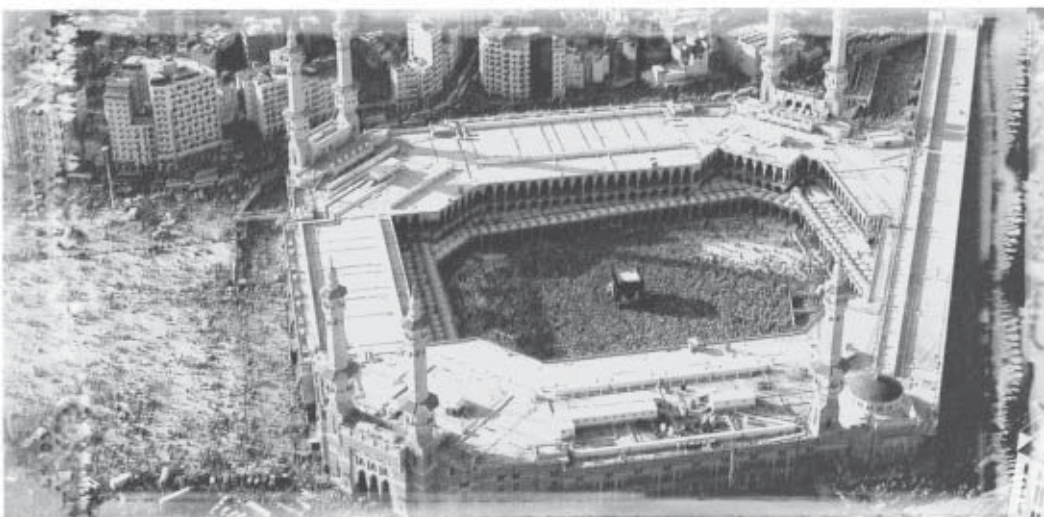
Muhammad did not always see the angel Gabriel when he had his revelations. Sometimes he just saw his eyes, and sometimes he only heard a voice. Sometimes the revelations came when he was deep in prayer, and at other times they occurred spontaneously as he was engaged in daily life. The manner in which the revelations came made them stand out as something quite different from the thoughts and teaching of Muhammad himself. These visions always made him feel close to death.

Early ministry

At first Muhammad did not preach in public but spoke privately to those who were interested or who had noticed a change in him. His first converts were his wife, Khadijah; his nephew, Ali; a slave boy, Zaid; and his friend the merchant, Abu Bakr. He began to daily practice the Muslim way of prayer, which drew comment from those around him. After a while, he began to preach on the street corners of Mecca. He told the town's traders that God would judge them by their works, and he challenged them to submit their lives to God and to practice love toward the poor and imprisoned, to slaves and foreigners.

It must have been very difficult for Muhammad to go out the first time to the people of Mecca, who knew him so well, and preach openly. Everyone was amazed. His kindness and gentle wisdom had shown him all his life to be a noble and devout man. But now he was claiming that he had received messages from God, and that he had been sent to change their lives. The moral teaching demanded an end to the immorality and corruption that the people did not want to give up. The message that all men were equal in the sight of God was intensely democratic and challenged the unjust class system. Although crowds gathered to listen, most people didn't want to change their lives.

The message of one invisible God was not suited to the taste of Meccans, who were used to worshiping many images of different gods made of wood and stone. Muhammad's own tribe was responsible for the care of the Kaaba and its idols. When his kinfolk realized that he was trying to stop people worshiping there, they were furious because it threatened the considerable income they made from the pilgrims who came to worship at the 360 idols.



They did not hurt Muhammad, but they threatened, ridiculed and insulted him. When this had no effect, they accused him of being a sorcerer, insulting the gods, and trying to split up families by making young men rebel against their fathers.

Muhammad's uncle, Abu Lahab, one of the tribal chiefs, tried argument, bribery and threat against him, but nothing would make him give in.

The people of Mecca were determined to stop Muhammad and his few followers at any cost. His enemies turned to abuse and slander, which soon turned into threats and outright persecution. They covered Muhammad and his followers with dirt and filth while they were offering their daily prayers. They pelted them with stones, beat them with sticks, threw them into prison, and tried to starve them by excluding them from all trade, charity and business. The first martyr of Islam was a woman, Sumayyah, and the first muezzin (caller to prayer) was the black slave Bilal, who was rescued after being left to die in the blazing sun with a huge rock on his chest.

The Night of Ascent

During the first three years of heartbreaking effort, Muhammad found fewer than forty followers. However, the opposition of his enemies soon proved to be no match for the truth of his words. Gradually, worthy men with energy and talent became convinced of the authenticity of his message, and by the end of the decade he had a following of several hundred families.

Still, it was a very difficult time and many Muslims were reduced to penury. In 619 Muhammad's wife died. She had been his most ardent supporter and helper. In the same year his uncle Abu Talib, who had protected him from the worst persecution, also died. Without their support Muhammad went through a time of bleakness and despair. The persecution became worse as his enemies took advantage of his difficulties. The wife of his uncle Abu Lahab used to take sharp thorns and rubbish and throw them down outside his house every day. Later, though, when she was taken ill, Muhammad did housework for her until she recovered.

It was during this year that Muhammad experienced the second most important night in his life, the Night of Ascent. It is not clear whether this experience was a vision, dream or psychic happening. Muhammad was awakened from his sleep and taken by a miraculous beast to Jerusalem. From the site of the old Jewish Temple on Mount Zion, he was taken through the seven heavens and shown paradise and hell. In each of these heavens he met and spoke with earlier prophets, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus the Messiah. During these conversations, he was given the number of times per day a devout Muslim should pray. Muhammad thought fifty times to be about right, but Moses said the burden would be too great for ordinary human beings, and the number was finally settled at five. Gradually, Muhammad approached the highest heaven and the Throne of God. Muhammad was aware only of great peace and the brilliance of pure light. Neither he nor the angel accompanying him could go beyond a certain point. Time, thought and feelings were stilled as Muhammad experienced the overwhelming blessing of the presence of God, an experience that he could never adequately put into words, for it was beyond all human expression and understanding. This experience brought great comfort and strength to the Prophet and confirmed that Allah had not deserted him.

Flight to Medina

From now Muhammad's fortunes changed drastically. He was invited to come to live in Yathrib, a town some 320 kilometers to the north of Mecca, by 75 of the leading citizens. This town originally had been a Jewish settlement but had been taken over by two Arab tribes who were fighting each other for sovereignty over the town. It seemed that this blood feud, which also involved the Jewish clans, would never end. The group of citizens who visited him were looking for a strong but just leader to bring peace. After considering this offer and receiving the pledge of the people to support Islam, Muhammad finally agreed to migrate to Yathrib.

First, he sent 70 Muslim families there, while he remained behind in Mecca. But when the people of Mecca learned about his intention to leave, they were determined to stop him at any cost. They wanted to destroy the revolutionary movement in case it grew further and threatened their very existence. When he finally managed to flee with one of his followers, a large group of his enemies pursued him, coming so close that his friend Abu Bakr in total despair cried, “We are only two.” Muhammad answered, “No, we are three, for God is with us.”

When Muhammad arrived in Yathrib, so many people rushed out to offer him refuge in their homes that he was embarrassed by their kindness. Not wanting to cause offense, he left the choice of residence up to his camel. The animal stopped where there were dates spread out to dry, and this place was given to the prophet to build his new home. He ensured that this new house had a huge courtyard which could be used as a place of prayer by the whole city.

The year was 622. The migration — known as the *hegira*, or “flight” — is regarded by Muslims as the turning point in world history and is the year from which they date their calendar. Yathrib soon changed its name to *Madinat al-Nabi*, “the city of the Prophet,” and then simply to Medina, “the city.”

Muhammad the ruler

Once in Medina, Muhammad was faced with many problems. He had to unite the different clans and tribes into a single strong community; he had to deal with Mecca, which was bound to attack Medina if Muhammad succeeded in making it strong; and he was concerned about how to convert the whole of Arabia.

Muhammad initiated the creation of a charter which would enable all the disputing tribes and factions in Medina to accept him and abide by his decisions. In this way they could end the blood feud. He ruled that all the citizens should be free to practice their own religion in peaceful co-existence, without fear of persecution or disfavor. He asked only that if the city faced any aggression from outside or tyranny from within, the citizens should join together and cooperate in the face of the enemy. The previous tribal laws of both the Arabs and Jews were replaced by the basic principle of general justice for all, irrespective of class, color or creed. In this way Muhammad challenged the whole political arrangement of Arabia, which until then had been based on the tribe. While each tribe and clan kept its own leader, Muhammad used his religious authority to make himself the leader of the whole city.

Muhammad had expected that the Jewish clans would support him, as they already believed in one God. However, when he talked to them about the Koran there was always controversy. There were certain differences between the Islamic and Jewish faiths. Muhammad could not deny his revelations, and the Jews maintained faith in their scriptures. Later, when all the Arab clans officially became Muslim, Islam became more Arabic and less Jewish. The direction of prayer was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca. The conflict between Arab and Jewish clans increased, finally resulting in the expulsion of the Jews from the city.

Although he was now the ruler of a city-state and in receipt of increasing wealth and influence, Muhammad never lived like a king. His dwellings were simple mud-brick houses. In his home he built the first mosque and led regular prayers. He believed strongly in good manners, always greeting people kindly and showing respect to elders. He balanced his serious teachings with a gentle good humor, saying, “The dearest of you to me are those who have good manners; the most offensive to me are the most boring and long-winded.” He was never arrogant or superior, despite his position as leader, and never made people feel small, unwanted or embarrassed. Muhammad slept on a very simple mattress on the floor and made it his practice

never to fill his stomach. He did not think it right to be idle while others were working, and he helped in the various labor projects of his friends. He owned few clothes and used to patch and sew his own clothes and shoes whenever the need arose.

In Medina, Muhammad remarried. Two of his wives were Jewish and one was Christian. His wives shared his devout way of life and made enormous personal sacrifices. They would often support him in his nightly prayers. Muhammad had only one more child, a son, who like his two sons by Khadijah died in infancy. His four daughters all married and bore children.

Muhammad's aim was the conversion of all of Arabia. He began initially by sending out missionaries to talk about Islam, followed up by proposals of alliances. By coming under the protection of Medina, other cities and tribes could escape from the destructive blood feuds. Still, the opposition from the Quraish tribe continued, and Muhammad was obliged to take part in warfare for the rest of his life. As a result of these wars, many rules of conduct of war and treatment of prisoners were laid down for Muslims, the rules of *jihad*. Jihad was never intended to be military activity for the sake of nationalism, tyranny or expansion. It was only for defense, and only until the enemy could be brought to peace. During the Prophet's battles, many of the enemy were converted to his side, impressed by Muslim chivalry, courage and faith in God.

Return to Mecca

In 628 a peace treaty was signed with Mecca. However, the following year the Meccans attacked one of the tribes who were allied to the Muslims. The Prophet came down on Mecca with a force of 10,000 men. They camped outside the city, and the Prophet promised a general amnesty if the Meccans would formally submit. In the end, only 28 Meccans were killed, including some of Muhammad's greatest enemies. Muhammad entered the city in triumph, went straight to the Kaaba and walked round it seven times. He then entered the shrine and destroyed all the idols and pictures except, it is said, those of Jesus and Mary. Uthman ibn Talha, who had once refused Muhammad entry to the Kaaba and had persecuted him, was given the key to the shrine, and it remains with his family to this day.

Muhammad's Final Sermon

O people listen carefully to what I say, for I do not know whether, after this year, I shall ever be amongst you again. Listen carefully, and report my words to those who cannot be here today.

Regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust. Hurt no one, so that no one may hurt you. Remember that you will indeed meet your Lord, and that he will reckon your deeds. You will neither inflict nor suffer injustice. Remember that you have rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as wives only under Allah's trust and with His permission. Treat them well and be kind to them, for they are your partners and committed helpers.

Worship Allah, say your five daily prayers; fast during the month of Ramadan, and give your wealth. Perform hajj, if you can afford to.

An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab; a white has no superiority over a black, nor a black over a white, except by piety and good deeds. Every Muslim is a brother to every other Muslim.

Muhammad returned to Medina, where he again was engaged in warfare against tribes who attacked the Muslims. In 632 the Prophet set out in pilgrimage to the Kaaba. During this pilgrimage revelations were given about the rules of the *hajj* which are followed by Muslims to this day. Muhammad also delivered his final sermon, the summarized text of which can be found in mosques all over the world:

At the end of the speech he looked around at the vast array of people. "Have I fulfilled my mission?" he cried. The crowd roared their approval. "You have fulfilled it, O messenger of God." Muhammad raised his eyes to heaven and called out three times, "O God, You are witness, You are witness, O God, You are witness." There was a moment's silence broken by the call to prayer from the powerful voice of Bilal.



After returning to Medina, Muhammad fell ill with a high fever and severe headaches. Still, he continued to lead the prayers in the mosque for as long as he was able but eventually requested Abu Bakr to take his place. He did not recover and died in the arms of his favorite wife, Aisha. He was sixty-two years old.

The expansion of Islam

Muhammad died with virtually all of Arabia under his control. Within a century, his followers had conquered Armenia,

Persia, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt and Spain. They crossed the Pyrenees into France, and had they not been defeated in 732 by the Frankish king Charles Martel, the entire Western world might today be Muslim. The domain of Islam extended from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean in Spain to India, an empire greater than that of Rome at its zenith.

It is not true that people were forced to become Muslims at the point of a sword. The formula was “Islam, tribute or the sword.” No one can be forced to believe any religion, and Muslims were actually tolerant to unbelievers as long as they lived within the law. Non-Muslims had to pay taxes, but those who became Muslims lived tax-free. In fact, some rulers actively discouraged conversions in order to balance their budgets!

Something to think about



- Do you think Muhammad would have been just as successful if he had lived in our time instead of when he did?
- Why do you think the Quraish merchants were so opposed to their kinsman Muhammad and his message?
- How true do you think it is that the most difficult people to impress are those in one's own family? Why do you think this is so? Is it a good thing?
- Write out an argument between Abu Lahab and Abu Talib, taking sides for and against Muhammad.
- Muslims believe they should place their loyalty to God before their loyalty to their families. Would this divide families or bring them closer together?

CHAPTER 25

The Teachings of Islam

Muslims believe that God's revelation to man came in four great stages. First, through Abraham, God revealed His Oneness; second, through Moses, He revealed the Ten Commandments; third, through Jesus, He revealed the commandment that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves; and fourth, through Muhammad, He revealed how to put this into practice, both in private and in social life. Islam teaches one to walk the straight path, a path that is neither crooked nor corrupt. This way of life encompasses the moral, social, economic and political realms, and Islam clearly explains how a person or society should be ordered in each of these areas.

The Koran

Muslims believe that a person's life ultimately can be fulfilled only through his relationship of service to God. In fact, man is created to be *abd*, meaning "worshiper" and "servant" of God. However, how can we know how God wants us to live? Since God is just, He has a duty to reveal His will and give a code of conduct by which we should live.



God has revealed this through His prophets many times. The problem was that the God-given principles of social ethics and morality, called by Muslims the *Shari'ah*, were ignored and forgotten as people departed from the path of truth. But God does not force people to live in His way, because of the freedom and responsibility that He has given them. Instead, He has appointed virtuous men to be prophets. Muslims believe there were at least 124,000 prophets who came to show people the right way of life by their own personal example.

Of these thousands of prophets, five enjoy a special status: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and finally Muhammad, who came as "the seal of prophets." Each of these prophets was given a complete revelation of the book of the knowledge of God. However, Muslims believe that these books and teachings were not preserved properly. Abraham's was lost altogether, and the revelations that Moses and Jesus received were written down

many years after their deaths. Still, Muslims respect the scriptures of both Jews and Christians.

We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and his children, and what was given to Moses and Jesus, and what was given to all other Prophets from their Lord. We make no difference between any of them; and to Him we submit ourselves.

— Surah 2:136

In the Koran, God revealed through Muhammad the same revelation that he had given before.

Nothing is said to you that was not said to the messengers before you.

— Surah 41:43

Muhammad made sure that all the revelations he received were committed to memory, written down, put in order and checked during his lifetime. They were arranged into 114 surahs, or chapters, and this is the form in which the Koran exists today. Thus, for Muslims, its authority is final, and every word is holy and unchangeable. Muslims believe that the Koran is the final and most perfect of God's revelations. However, according to the Koran, all these revelations of The Book are still only a limited manifestation of the unlimited knowledge of God.

And if all the trees that are in the earth were pens, and the ocean were ink, with seven oceans added to them, the words of God would not be exhausted.

— Surah 31:27

According to biblical history, there have been several covenants between God and man. These covenants, as we saw when studying Judaism, are binding agreements between God and man. The metaphors used to describe this relationship, such as parent and child or husband and wife, stress how intimate this bond is. According to the Bible, God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, King David and Jesus. According to the Koran, its revelation is a new covenant which completes the previous ones.

Hadith

Hadith, often referred to as “traditions,” are the recorded words, actions and instructions of the Prophet Muhammad. After Muhammad died, many collections of his sayings and deeds appeared. These are held in great respect but are quite separate from the Koran.

Shari'ah

Shari'ah is the code of behavior for a Muslim, the law that determines the rightness or wrongness of any action. It provides a criterion for judging all behavior and conduct, the relationships between people, with society and with one's own self.

The moment a Muslim opens his eyes and becomes conscious of God, the most important questions become “What shall I do now? How shall I live?” Being aware of God alters a Muslim's entire motivation for doing things, and stops him from doing many things that would give a great deal of selfish pleasure.

Muslims believe that many societies have made many attempts to establish justice without making laws dependent

This is my straight path, so follow it, and do not follow any other paths which will separate you from this path.

— Surah 6:153

God does not accept belief if it is not expressed in deeds; and He does not accept your deeds unless they conform to your beliefs.

— Hadith



on God's will. Without God's help, none of these attempts have worked. While it is important that individuals live righteously, true justice will never come about until the whole society follows the will of God. Individuals and the society must together find the Shari'ah, meaning "the path," and follow it.

To follow

Shari'ah means to live a morally responsible life. If everyone lives this way, recognizing all people as one family, aware of their rights and defending them, grieving when they get hurt, being determined to bring about their good and not their harm, then they have already started to live according to the Shari'ah.

The basis of Shari'ah is wisdom, and the welfare of people in this world as well as the Hereafter. This welfare lies in complete justice, mercy, care and wisdom. Anything that departs from justice to oppression, from mercy to harshness, from caring to misery, and from wisdom to folly, has nothing to do with the Shari'ah.

— Ibn Qayyim
Muslim educator

It is important to note that even though religious practice is emphasized, spirituality is connected to the physical realities of everyday life. External acts of worship depend on the believer's internal intention, and so the goal is to preserve harmony and wholeness between the inner and outer aspects of life. In other words, not only is it the duty of Muslims to be mindful of God at all times, but every word they utter and every action they perform should also reflect that primal communion with God. Every action of a Muslim should be an indication of his obedience to God's will and should be offered so as to bring pleasure to God.

Rules of behavior

The Koran is the basis of the Shari'ah and is supplemented by the teaching and example of Muhammad. In applying the Shari'ah to the modern world, Muslims use their reason and judgment to decide on a course of action most in keeping with the spirit of the Koran and Hadith. In making a decision the following are taken into consideration:

- ✕ the opinions of respected people
- ✕ previous decisions and precedents
- ✕ justice and concern for the public good
- ✕ the acceptance of the masses

From this, five categories of behavior have been developed:

- ✕ **fard** — things that must be done, such as prayer
- ✕ **haram** — things that must never be done, such as drinking alcohol

- ✕ **mandub** — recommended actions, such as unselfish hospitality
- ✕ **makruh** — actions not forbidden, but disapproved of, such as divorce
- ✕ **mubah** — actions to be decided by conscience because there is no clear guidance, such as smoking



Like other religions, Islam teaches that everyone is responsible for his own spiritual life.

Whoever commits a sin commits it only against his own soul.

— Surah 4:111

Whoever goes astray, he himself bears the whole responsibility of wandering.

— Surah 10:108

How a person lives his life on the earth will decide his fate in the world of the life after death. According to this accounting, a soul may be sent either to heaven or hell. The Koran gives a graphic and vivid description of these two states. Heaven abounds in deep rivers of cool, crystal water, lush fruit and vegetation, boundless fertility, and beautiful mansions with gracious attendants. Hell, on the other hand, is described as a place with molten metal, boiling liquids, and fire that splits everything into pieces. Whereas some understand these descriptions to be literal, other scholars regard them as metaphors.

Since a person is responsible for his own life, he has been given freedom by his Creator. Thus a person's religious devotion too must be rooted in his freedom of choice. This is why the Koran says,

"There should be no compulsion in religion."

— Surah 2:256

A Muslim is one who of his own free will has chosen to submit to God. However, in submitting to God, all slavery to other things is broken — a person is no longer the servant of any other person, ideology or institution. When he submits to God, a person becomes God's khalifa, or vice regent on earth.

Jihad

Jihad means "striving" and applies to any sort of activity made by a person because of love of Allah. For most Muslims, it refers to the deliberate effort to serve Allah to the best of one's ability through a life of devotion, self-sacrifice, and love and compassion for others. It is this struggle against one's personal desires that Muhammad called the "great jihad."

The word is also used when speaking about a military situation in which Muslims are called upon to fight for the honor or preservation of their faith. Jihad does not mean forcing other people to accept Islamic beliefs, but striving to bring about a society in which Muslims are free to obey Allah's laws, leaving others to worship or not as they wish.

Usually, when people feel oppressed or are aware that tyranny is spoiling the life of a community, they hope that if they point out the injustices, then the conscience of the rulers will cause them to put things right.

The most excellent jihad is to speak the truth in the face of a tyrannical ruler.

— Hadith

Sometimes, however, rulers do not respond, and it becomes necessary to make a decision about what to do next. If an individual, group or government tries to impose rules that are unacceptable to the will of Allah, they should be resisted, by force if necessary.

Muslims believe that war can be justified in such circumstances, but the purpose of war is to establish a just peace. Once an enemy is defeated, the principle of mercy should be applied immediately and all hostilities should cease. Wounded enemy soldiers are to be given exactly the same treatment as wounded members of one's own forces, and the women and children of the enemy should never be molested or harmed. Muhammad said, "Hate your enemy mildly; he may become your friend one day." (Hadith)

Equality of mankind

Muslims believe that God created a single pair of human beings and that all people living today are descended from this couple. For some time, everyone had the same religion and spoke the same language. However, as people spread out across the world, they grew apart in customs and language and divided into different tribes. Their physical features changed to suit the different climates. However, these differences led to prejudices based on race, color, nationality and language.

Islam declares that since all have sprung from the same parents, all men are brothers and equal in their status as human beings. The differences among people that Islam considers important are those of belief and moral conduct. If two children of the same mother have different beliefs and moral values, they will have different ways of life. On the other hand, two people from opposite ends of the earth will tread the same path in life if they have the same beliefs and moral behavior. Islam seeks to build a community of people based not on nationality, race or color but on shared beliefs and moral principles. So within Islam there are no racial, national or class distinctions. This is why Muhammad strongly criticized nationalism.

Whoever proclaims the cause of nationalism is not one of us; and whoever dies in the cause of nationalism is not one of us. Nationalism means helping your people in unjust causes.

— Hadith

The House of Islam

A Muslim is expected to worship God for his whole life. For this reason eating, drinking and marriage all come within the scope of worship if a Muslim performs them with the right attitude. This is why Muslims refer to the "House of Islam." Just as you live much of your life in your house, so Muslims can live their whole lives in the House of Islam.

Essentially, every Muslim should live with God, not merely when he prays, but all the time, during every activity in which he engages.

And when you have finished the Prayer, remember Allah while standing, and sitting, and lying on your sides.

— Surah 4:103

The foundation of the House of Islam is the Koran. In the Middle East, every house was supported by pillars. The support of the House of Islam is the Five Pillars of confession of faith, prayer, charity, fasting and pilgrimage. The Five Pillars are the principles that regulate the private life of a Muslim and clearly explain what is expected of him in his submission to God. All houses also need a roof, and for the House of Islam the roof is the Holy Law, the Shari'ah.

The Five Pillars of Islam

1. The confession of faith

Every religion contains convictions that orient its adherents' lives in some way. The creed of Islam, the shahadah, is,

La ilaha illal Lahu. Muhammadur rasulullah.

There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Prophet of God.



This sums up all one has to believe to be a Muslim. When spoken in Arabic and with sincere intention, these words represent a commitment to obey God and follow the Prophet. These are the first words whispered into a child's ear at birth, and the last that a Muslim utters with his dying breath. Although a practicing Muslim repeats this phrase many times a day, at least once during his lifetime he should say this creed correctly, thoughtfully, aloud, with full understanding and with heartfelt conviction in its truth.

2. Salah

The Koran defines a human being as a worshiper, and places the individual worshiper in the context of a worshiping community. Thus, prayer and worship are communal acts as well as acts of individual commitment.

Through prayer man is reminded that he is not God. He is a created being rather than the Creator. When people forget this, they try to place themselves at the center of the universe. When this happens and a person tries to play God, everything goes wrong. Man is a created being, and his life slips into place and stays in proper perspective only when he recognizes this fact. A Muslim prays partly in response to the natural yearning of the human heart to pour forth its love and gratitude toward its Creator, and partly to keep his life in its proper perspective and to submit himself to the will of God, his rightful sovereign.

Salah is the name given to the prayer that Muslims do five times a day. After ritual washing, Muslims gather together in rows as a community, prostrate themselves before God and pray facing Mecca. The realization that his brothers and sisters are doing likewise in every corner of the globe creates a sense of participating in a worldwide fellowship, even when a Muslim is physically isolated.

Prayer purifies the heart and brings about spiritual and moral growth. It draws people closer to God; brings a sense of peace and tranquillity; encourages equality, unity and brotherhood; develops gratitude and humility; demonstrates obedience; trains in cleanliness, purity and punctuality; develops discipline and willpower; draws the mind away from personal worries; calms passions and allows the mastery of the baser instincts.

The prayer consists of: praise of God, gratitude to Him for all His goodness, supplication, and asking God for guidance and forgiveness.

3. Zakah

Islam teaches that wealth is something given by God for the benefit of humanity and therefore is something to be shared. In Arabic Zakah means “purification,” and it is possible that one of the ideas behind Zakah is that wealth can be an evil thing and can separate a believer from God. The aim of paying Zakah is to keep one’s attitude toward wealth free of greed and selfishness. It is intended to cleanse the heart of the love of money and the desire to cling to it.

Material things are important in life, but some people have more than others. Islam is not concerned with the reason for this, but only with what should be done about the situation. The answer is simple. Those who have much should help lift the burden of those who are less fortunate. In the seventh century, Muhammad instituted Zakah by prescribing an annual tax. This money must be used to provide for orphans, widows, the poor, the homeless and strangers, and for religious purposes such as building a mosque or supporting a Muslim school.

He is not a believer who eats his fill while his neighbor remains hungry by his side.

— Hadith

The Koran is more concerned about the quality of the giving than the quantity. The attitude of the giver is in fact more important than what he gives. Giving should be discreet and not arrogant. For this reason, Zakah is usually paid in secret so that rich people receive no false praise or admiration, since they are doing no more than their duty, and poor people are not made ashamed in receiving.

4. Saum

Ramadan is Islam’s holy month, in accordance with the lunar calendar, because during this month Muhammad received his first message from God. So Ramadan is a celebration of the gift of the Koran to Muslims. During Ramadan, healthy adult Muslims will go without all the pleasures of the body between dawn and dusk. Saum, or fasting, is the deliberate control of the body by an act of will.

O believers, you must fast so that you may learn self-restraint. Fasting is prescribed for you during a fixed number of days, so that you may safeguard yourself against spiritual and moral ills.

— Surah 2:183-4

Hunger, comfort and sexual desire are the three things that have to be brought under control. Fasting, then, means no food, drink, smoking, or sexual intercourse. Also, a conscious effort must be made to avoid any evil thought or deed.

If you do not give up telling lies, God will have no need of your giving up food and drink.

— Hadith

After a few hours of fasting, the body feels uncomfortable and starts to complain. This is the time for the mind to take control and not allow the body to get its way. The path to obedience gradually becomes easier, and so does resisting temptation.

The social behavior of the whole community changes during Ramadan. The pace of life slows, and it is a time for reflection. It is a period when social relationships are reaffirmed, reconciled and the solidarity of the community is expressed. Everyone from the richest to the poorest fasts together. Fasting has several benefits. It makes a person reflect on his spiritual state. Fasting is an act of self-discipline. A person who can endure its demands will have less difficulty controlling his appetites at other times. Fasting also reminds the practitioner of his essential frailty and dependence on God. Fasting provides an opportunity to develop greater sensitivity and compassion, since only those who have been hungry can know what hunger means.

5. Hajj

The dearest wish of any devout Muslim is to be able to perform the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca. Hajj means “to set out with a definite purpose,” and it is the duty of every Muslim who can afford it, and who is physically fit, to undertake it once in his lifetime.

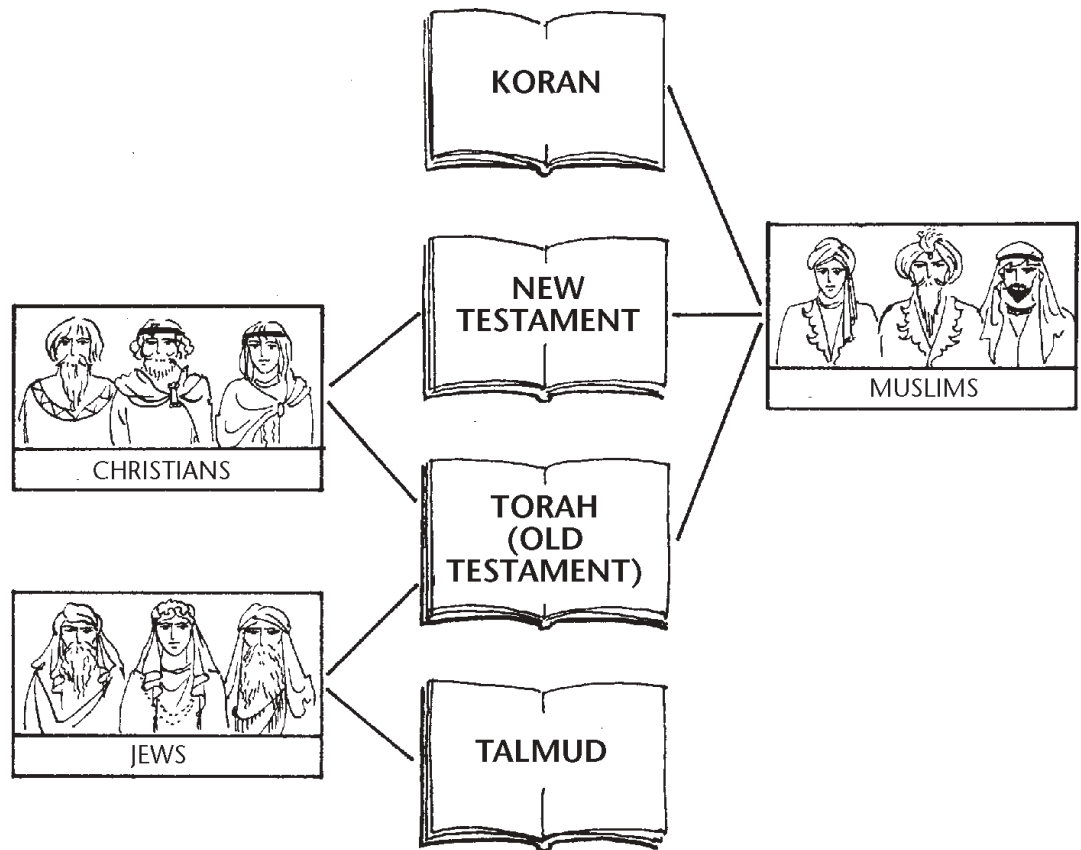


The symbolism of the Hajj goes back to the beginnings of the human story, to Adam and Eve, and after them to Abraham. It was at one of the sites visited during the Hajj that Adam and Eve were reconciled with God, and it was at another that Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son. It was to this area as well that Hagar went after leaving Abraham's family, and it was the place where Abraham and Ishmael together built a sanctuary which later became known as the Kaaba. For 4,000 years the Kaaba has been a very holy place. When Muslims undertake the Hajj, they are following in the footsteps of Adam, Eve, Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael and re-enacting important episodes in their lives.

The purpose of the pilgrimage, undertaken during the twelfth month of the lunar year, is to heighten the pilgrim's devotion to God. It is also a reminder of the equality of all people. Upon arriving in Mecca, pilgrims remove their usual clothes, which carry a clear indication of social status, and don simple white garments. All distinctions of rank

and hierarchy are removed, and prince and pauper stand before God in their undivided humanity. The first act, no matter what time of day or night the pilgrim arrives, is to hurry to the Kaaba and walk around it seven times, at a fast pace, to symbolize love for God. This is followed by visiting other sites and performing other symbolic acts to re-enact scenes from biblical history.

Pilgrimage brings together people from various countries and demonstrates that they have in common a loyalty that transcends the loyalties of the warring kingdoms of man. Pilgrims gain information about their brothers in other lands and return to their own with a better understanding of one another. Whereas in 1939 there were 60,000 pilgrims on the Hajj, in 1990 there were more than 2.5 million pilgrims from all over the world.



Something to think about



- How do you understand the phrase “Submission to God destroys any other kind of slavery”? Do you agree?
- What can you include (from your own life) in the five categories of behavior for Muslims?
- Try to formulate five pillars that form the basis of your own life.
- In what ways does the practice of Zakah help a person become detached from love of self and love of possessions?
- Is a person who gives money away richer than the person who keeps it?
- In what ways do you think the experience of the Ramadan fast draws Muslims together in a special feeling of brotherhood?
- How does the practice of discipline and self-control build up a defense against moral and spiritual weakness?



To read

This Too Shall Pass, by Fariduddin Attar, 12th century Persian mystical poet
From *Tales from the Land of the Sufis*, by Mojdeh Bayat and Muhammad Ali Jamnia

CHAPTER 26

Peer Pressure

No matter how much we like to think we are independent or different, we cannot avoid the fact that we care about the opinions of other people. That is natural. The more important a person is to us, the more his opinion matters. During childhood, our parents' opinion is the one that we value and that affects us most. Because we want to be loved and accepted by our parents, we try to do as we are told, conform to their mores, fulfill their expectations and make them happy.

As we grow older, we come to value the opinions of our peers — that is, those who are in the same age group as ourselves. It is then that we start to experience “peer pressure” to conform to the values, fashions, opinions, and mannerisms of our peers. Conflict often arises between the values of our parents and those of our peers. We ask ourselves, “Which values shall I adopt, those of my parents or those of my friends? In whose eyes is it most important for me to be accepted? Do I really know who I am?”

What is peer pressure?

Like most things in life, peer pressure can be good or bad. Good peer pressure may push us to conform to a higher standard than we might otherwise. Bad pressure, on the other hand, may push us to do something we feel is morally wrong. This pressure comes in many different forms, some subtle, some not. It may be expressed through looks and comments, or through actions such as ignoring a person or even ostracizing him. Occasionally peer pressure is enforced with the threat and fear of violence.

The reason why peer pressure exists is that individuals within a group wish to maintain a certain standard to which all the members of the group will conform. Without this conformity there will no longer be a group, since the members will no longer have a common identity.

Peer pressure may affect us in different ways. On the simplest level, we experience peer pressure in the way we dress. For example, a conventional businessman wears a suit and tie. If he turned up at the office one day without a tie, people would look at him as if he were undressed. Among our friends and associates, there is pressure to wear a certain kind of clothing — maybe jeans with a particular label, or a certain kind of footwear. We may feel uncomfortable being different from those we regard as our peers. The same applies in other areas. There is pressure to use a certain kind of language or to hold certain opinions in order to be accepted. This is where we are most challenged. Do we remain silent because we are afraid to contradict the views of our peers? How can we keep our integrity and not end up feeling one thing, saying another and doing still another?

Usually matters involving peer pressure are more complex than the externals of dress. In fact, peer pressure even influences the way the global community operates.

Governments are put under pressure by other governments to conform to certain universally accepted standards of human rights and international law. In a democratic society, the government needs to consider public opinion, for loss of the people's trust can lead to the loss of power.

Good peer pressure

Good peer pressure helps to maintain society. The members of every community are expected to behave in a certain way. For example, within the scientific commu-

nity there are standards that all scientists are expected to meet — in particular, intellectual honesty. It is a terrible crime for a scientist to falsify his results, since this misleads the whole community. Thus, there is considerable peer pressure for people to be honest. The findings of individual scientists are checked by their peers to make sure they are accurate. A scientist who is found to have cheated no longer will be respected, and his other work will also fall under suspicion. His name and reputation will be tarnished.

Within a community, people are expected to treat their neighbors in a certain way without being told,

reminded or asked outright. Imagine that a family blasted their radio at an intolerable volume every night from midnight until three in the morning. What do you think would happen? In what way would they be pressured by their neighbors not to behave in such a selfish manner? Should it be necessary to call the police, or do you think that this behavior could be corrected within the community? This is one of the

ways that peer pressure is good. It keeps people from acting as they please in ways that harm the community, and thus in many cases such pressure restrains people from hurting one another. Without such good pressure to behave in a certain way, society would quickly disintegrate into complete anarchy.

Evil prospers when good men do nothing.

— Edmund Burke

Bad peer pressure

Often we may feel pressured by friends or associates to conform by doing or saying things we know to be wrong. We may be expected to smoke, to drink, to behave in a certain way, to treat others disrespectfully, or to keep quiet when we know that something wrong is going on. Often bad pressure is exerted by people who are insecure. They know that what they are doing is wrong, but they feel that if they can persuade others to behave in the same way or implicate others in their bad activities, they will be justified. A person who refuses to “play the game,” however, is seen as a threat because he will not give up his higher standard. This makes the people who are involved in a wrong activity feel judged. Thus, much of the problem comes from the insecurity of those who don't know deeply who they are and so try to find their identity in a group. A person who doesn't conform not only threatens the group's identity but also unmask the superficial identity of its individual members.

Although people of all ages have to deal with peer pressure, it is felt especially strongly by teenagers. Adolescence is a time of life that is exciting and filled with

possibilities. There are many things one feels newly capable of doing and wants to try. Relationships are able to grow to new levels, and one begins to discover who one is and what one's capabilities are. But this is also a challenging time, and important decisions have to be made. Some of these decisions can affect the rest of one's life, and can be made either deliberately or by default — that is, one either consciously decides to behave in a certain way or falls into a decision as a result of not thinking about it ahead of time.

An important thing to remember is that all teenagers are in similar circumstances. No matter how confident or secure one's friends and peers may appear, inside they are probably at least a little unsure of themselves. Everyone wants to look good in front of others; no one wants people to think that he or she is weak or insecure. Taking a look at the way you have handled peer pressure in the past may help you to decide how you would like to handle it in the future.

How should I handle peer pressure?

Like many people, you may be wondering how best to handle bad peer pressure. For each person and every situation, the response may be different. However, you may find the following ideas useful. The most important thing is to know yourself, who you are, what your values are, and to be determined to maintain your personal integrity and self-respect. Next is to recognize what is happening when you are being pressured. When we can see what is going on, it becomes easier to resist peer pressure.

If you feel that your friends may pressure you to do something you're not sure about, you may want to take time and think about your true feelings and beliefs. For example, if you know that some of your friends are planning a party and will be drinking alcohol, you may want to think about how you feel about drinking before you are ever in that situation. You may want to make a list in your mind of the pros and cons, or actually write them down on paper. If you have a good friend, you may talk to him or her about it.

For example:

What is the issue?

Drinking with my friends.

How do I feel about drinking?

BAD

- I hate the taste of liquor and beer.
- I hate it when one of my relatives comes over for dinner and gets drunk.
- I don't like the way other people act when they are drunk.
- I think people use alcohol because they don't think they can do without it.
- I want to be able to remember all the things I say and do at all times.

GOOD

- I'll be like everyone else at the party, and they won't give me a hard time about not drinking.
- I might feel more comfortable.
- I'd like to try drinking sometime just to see what all the talk is about.

How do I feel about my friends if they put pressure on me to drink? I don't feel too good about everybody drinking. I think we could have a good time together without alcohol. If they are really my friends, I should be able to just tell them how I feel, and they should be able to accept that, even if they don't agree with me.

What are the Possible Consequences of My Actions?

You may also consider the consequences of your actions. This may help you make quick decisions with a more level-headed approach. You may think: How will this affect me later? How will it affect someone else? What will happen if I don't go along with everyone else? Will my actions hurt any of my close relationships? What is the issue here?

Imagine for a moment that you are with a group of friends who are having a party at a friend's flat. They are playing drinking games, and they want you to join in. Most of the people playing are drunk already.

What might happen if you play?

- ✗ You might get drunk too and not be able to go home, even though your parents are expecting you.



- ✗ You might get sick from drinking too much.
- ✗ You might start acting stupid if you drink too much, and the other kids might notice.
- ✗ You might like drinking a lot and get into a habit that you really don't want to start.
- ✗ The other kids might think you are cool and respect you for your carefree attitude.

What might happen if you don't play

- ✗ You might get rejected by the others who are playing, and they might call you a little kid.
- ✗ You might feel uncomfortable being the only sober person in a room full of drunk friends
- ✗ You might be able to remain friends with all the other kids even though you'd rather not drink.

Thinking ahead is difficult, especially when you are in a new or unexpected situation. You may feel awkward and not know what to do, or you may not know how to reply immediately. You should take the time, even if only a few seconds, to think clearly about the implications and possible results of your actions.

Although it is difficult in pressing situations, you should try to be honest with yourself and others about your feelings. This is a big challenge, yet most people admire and respect those who are able to say what they really feel. You may even be the deciding influence for those of your friends who also are not comfortable with what they are doing. Perhaps they will follow your example. Being honest about your feelings takes a lot of courage. You have to be ready to hear your peers make fun of you or complain. They may want you to join what they are doing because they think, "It can't be so bad if everyone is doing it."

What can you say?

- ✗ "I feel really bad about doing this."
- ✗ "I don't feel good about this."
- ✗ "I don't feel comfortable doing this."
- ✗ "If I do this, I know I'll be sorry later."
- ✗ "I don't think this is right."
- ✗ "No, thanks."

Talking to an older person to whom you feel close — your parent, brother or sister, or other relative, or perhaps a teacher — may help. An older person can give you a different point of view because he is not directly involved in your situation.

And, although it may be hard to imagine, most of those older than you have been through something similar — perhaps exactly what you are facing. Make sure to pick someone you trust and respect, and let him know what you are honestly feeling. Such a person can encourage you and give you the support necessary to stand up to peer pressure.

A true friend helps you to be your best

My best friend has a boyfriend now, and every night it's the same thing: "Please come out with us. If my mom knows that I'm with you, she won't mind." I've even had to lie to her parents on the phone a few times to save her from getting in trouble. At first it didn't bother me, but sometimes I really feel like I'm being used, and I especially hate lying to her parents. I don't want to stop being friends with her. I would have a rough time in school without her, but I hate feeling so pushed to do and say things I don't feel are right, or just don't want to do.

— Valentina, age 14

If you find that what you value is very different from what your friends value, you may want to consider the reasons you are friends with them. Can you trust them? Can you talk to them about personal matters? Do they respect what you value? What do you have in common? What do you think is important in a friendship? Are they really friends?

Friendship is important to almost every person regardless of age, and so deserves serious consideration. In many cases, people have achieved great things because of their friends. They have found inspiration, support, understanding and closeness which cannot be found in solitude. But many good people also have been corrupted because of their friendships. What kind of friends do you think you have — the kind who help you to be the best you can be, or the kind who always seem to be doing something you don't like, or who do things that hurt you?

Although your friends may pressure you to do things that you don't feel are right, keep in mind that you can help them to do the right thing too, without acting like a know-it-all or having a holier-than-thou attitude.

Saying what you firmly believe and encouraging others to follow a high ethical standard may begin on a basic level (such as telling people how you feel about making fun of unpopular students), but through expressing your beliefs in minor situations you are creating a pattern that may influence many more people in a good way throughout your whole life. You can initiate peer pressure for goodness!

Many times a real friend may truly appreciate your concern and honesty.

Your friend may be getting involved in something that he or she feels doubtful about, and will be relieved to hear what you really think! In some cases it takes only one person expressing himself honestly to prevent a whole group of people from doing something harmful. Your other friends may just be going along because they are afraid of being rejected or disapproved of.

Your true friends are more concerned about you and how things will affect you than they are about what other people think, so don't be afraid to be honest. Those people who are true to you will respect what you feel and not pressure you to go along with something you know is wrong.



For Your Journal



Describe an occasion when you experienced bad peer pressure and how you felt about it afterward. What else might you have done?

Man's Search for Meaning

by Viktor Frankl

As the existence of each man is different from the existence of others, man himself is unique. ...

The uniqueness of each man and the peculiarity of each life are indispensable parts of the meaning of human existence. The peculiarity in question must be distinguished from a superficial difference to others, because the latter has no value in itself. The fact one person differs from another by fingerprints does not make them unique.

So when we say that due to its uniqueness a human life is not meaningless, we mean a different kind of uniqueness.

The existence of man as a personality means his absolute difference to others. For the peculiarity of each person means they are different from other people.

Thus man cannot be considered as an element of any system of a higher order — in this case he would inevitably lose the quality by which human existence is marked — the feeling of dignity. It is most clearly manifested in the phenomenon of the mob. A mob in itself has neither consciousness, nor responsibility. ...

Hiding and discovering in a mob, a man loses his most important quality — responsibility. On the other hand, when he takes up a task proposed by society, he achieves quite a different thing: His responsibility increases. A real community is in fact a community of responsible personalities; a mob is just a lot of depersonalized beings.

The really human begins in man when he acquires freedom to oppose the dependence on the depersonalized collectivism of a mob. For only there, in that freedom, in the feeling of his free and responsible existence, a genuine man appears.

CHAPTER 27

Smoking, Drinking and Drugs

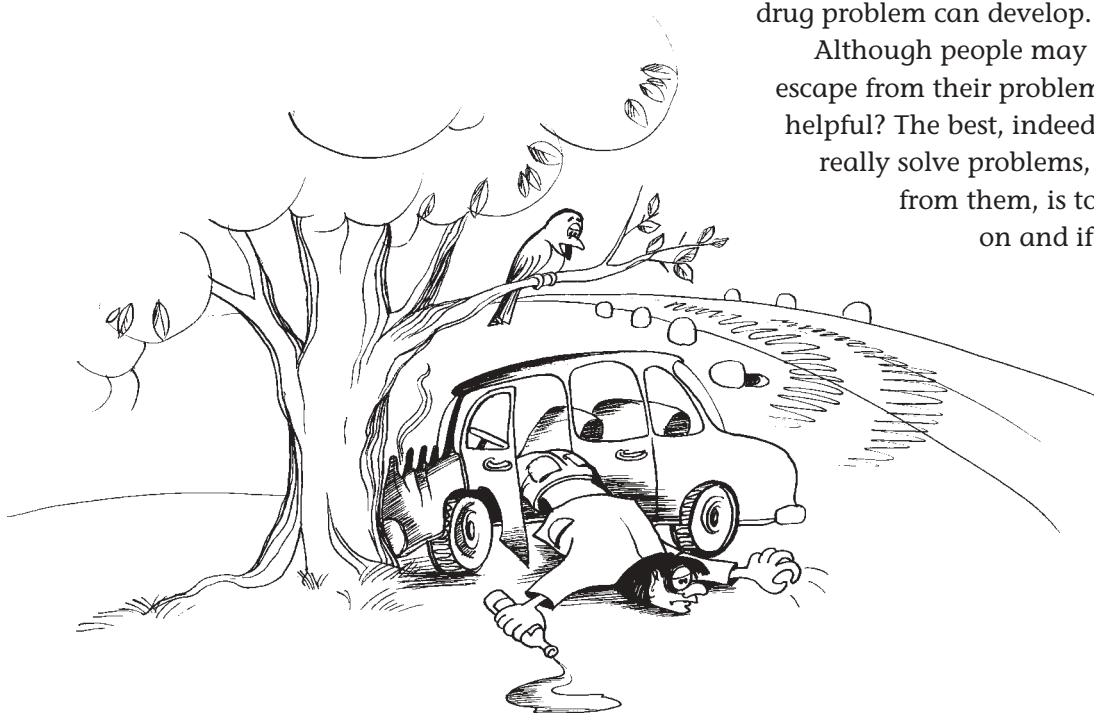
Every year thousands of people die and suffer ill health from the effects of smoking, drinking and drugs. What is it that attracts people to use these substances, which in some cases cause immediate death and in other cases cause terminal illnesses such as cancer and heart disease? Let us look at some of the facts behind cigarettes, alcohol and drugs.

What is a drug?

In the course of our life almost all of us use drugs of some sort or another. A drug is a substance that alters the chemistry of our body and, consequently, affects the natural balance of our mind and emotions. Drugs that can be prescribed by a doctor include substances such as penicillin which are intended to cure infections, and sleeping pills, tranquilizers and anti-depressants, which are intended to help a person to relax. Cigarettes and alcohol, which we can “prescribe” for ourselves, have a similar function and are also drugs.

Adolescence can be a particularly difficult time. Teenagers may be under conflicting pressures from parents, school and friends, and many difficult choices may have to be made. It can also be a period of boredom and frustration. As a result, young people are vulnerable to the offer of something that may be fun or make them feel better. But they often don't know about the risks involved, or how easily a serious drug problem can develop.

Although people may use drugs to try to escape from their problems, is this really helpful? The best, indeed the only way to really solve problems, rather than escape from them, is to confront them head on and if necessary get help.



What is drug abuse and drug addiction?

Drug dependence and drug addiction can be described as a condition in which the user has the following characteristics:

- ✗ An overpowering desire or need to continue taking the drug and to obtain it by any means
- ✗ A tendency to increase the dose
- ✗ A psychological and usually physical dependence on the effects of the drug
- ✗ The appearance of an “abstinence syndrome” with symptoms of acute distress when the drug is withdrawn
- ✗ Detrimental effects to both the individual and society

When a person is psychologically or physically addicted to a drug, he will experience “withdrawal symptoms” when he stops using the drug. Withdrawal symptoms for drug addicts may include yawning, runny nose, tears, sweating, loss of appetite, trembling, goose flesh, abdominal cramps, insomnia, restlessness, vomiting, diarrhea, and weight loss. As seen by the onset of such symptoms at the time of withdrawal from drugs, there is a physical basis for dependence. The drug actually becomes a part of the cell structure of the body. The addict comes to depend on the drug in order to function normally. But the other factor is psychological dependence, which may be even more difficult for a drug addict withdrawing from a drug.

Smoking

Why do people smoke?

The Russian Orthodox priest Alexander Elchaninov, who worked with young people, expresses clear insight into the real reasons and dangers behind smoking:



The motives that lead people to start smoking are mean and vulgar — wanting to be like others, fear of being laughed at, the desire to gain greater prestige: the psychology of a coward and a criminal combined. This leads to estrangement from family and friends. Aesthetically speaking, this vulgarity is especially insufferable in girls. Psychologically speaking, smoking opens the door to all that is forbidden and sinful. It obscures our sense of purity and chastity. Our first cigarette is already our first fall, the loss of our purity. It is not false Puritanism but an immediate feeling and a deep conviction, which leads me to say this to you. Ask any smoker — the beginning of smoking was for him, in a sense, a fall.

Once a person has started to smoke, even though he may wish to stop, he continues for reasons such as the following:

- ✗ from habit
- ✗ to relax
- ✗ for pleasure
- ✗ to conform
- ✗ because of advertising

What happens when you smoke?

Tobacco is made up of some 300 chemicals, 40 of which are known poisons. When you smoke, chemicals enter the bloodstream.

- ✗ Nicotine is a very powerful drug that causes a rise in blood pressure and makes the heart beat faster.
- ✗ Tar from tobacco contains a number of substances that can cause cancer. When someone inhales tobacco smoke, the tar goes down into his lungs.
- ✗ Tobacco smoke contains irritants that affect the cells in the air passages. In order to protect the cells, mucus is produced. Smokers cough to try to clear the irritants and extra mucus.
- ✗ Tobacco smoke contains carbon monoxide, a deadly gas which affects the blood's ability to carry oxygen around the body. Without enough oxygen, the body works more slowly.

Smoking and health

Did you know?

- ✗ On average, each cigarette a person smokes shortens his life by 5 1/2 minutes.
- ✗ It takes 10 years after you stop smoking for your body to shake off the effects.
- ✗ Smoking can contribute to and cause many diseases, such as

Profile of a teenage smoker: Marcus Jones, age 15

Interviewer: How much do you smoke?

Marcus: About ten cigarettes a day.

Interviewer: How much does this cost you?

Marcus: Nearly \$10 a week.

Interviewer: When did you begin smoking?

Marcus: I had my first cigarette when I was about nine — I felt really sick. I started smoking regularly when I was about 13.

Interviewer: Do many of your friends smoke?

Marcus: Yes, about half of them, but a few are trying to give up.

Interviewer: And you, are you going to give up?

Marcus: Perhaps when I'm older.

Interviewer: Why did you start smoking?

Marcus: My mom and step-dad smoked. I started stealing their cigarettes. I feel a bit rebellious smoking, I suppose.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Marcus: Well, it's not the thing to do these days, is it? So it feels different to be called a smoker.

- **Bronchitis:** Most deaths from chronic bronchitis are caused by smoking, tens of thousands of people each year
- **Emphysema:** This disease, of which smoking is one of the primary causes, causes the lungs to fill with fibrous matter, eventually making it impossible to breathe.
- **Heart disease:** Nicotine increases the heart rate and so wears down the heart. In addition, it damages the lining of the blood vessels, causing plaque to accumulate over the wounds and narrowing the vessels. Smoking is the cause of many deaths due to heart disease.
- **Cancer:** The great majority of deaths from lung cancer are caused by smoking.
- **Other problems:** Smokers are less fit than non-smokers, and are more likely to get colds, flu and other infections. Smoking can damage unborn babies, and can cause such problems as blood clots and stomach ulcers.

Social effects

Smoking doesn't just affect your health. It also has other negative effects.

- ✗ **Money:** Cigarettes are expensive. Money spent on cigarettes can't be spent on clothes, records or other things.
- ✗ **Health services:** Smoking costs health services millions of dollars per year that could be better spent on other illnesses. Cigarette smoking is responsible for

many premature deaths and thousands of serious illnesses every year.

- ✗ **Pollution:** Non-smokers are forced to breathe smoke because of smokers around them, becoming “secondary smokers.” Many non-smokers find the behavior of smokers extremely anti-social. A recent report says that non-smoking wives who live with smoking husbands have a 50 percent increase in the chance of having lung cancer.
- ✗ **Ecology:** Acres of trees are cut down to dry and cure tobacco. The long-term effects of growing tobacco are deforestation, erosion of soil and loss of land fertility.

Activities

1. Design a poster aimed at telling young people about the dangers of smoking.
2. Interview someone who is a smoker. Before you begin, draw up a list of the questions you are going to ask him or her. Afterwards, work in a group and compare the results of your interviews. Did you notice any difference between the answers of younger people and older people?

Alcohol

Alcohol is a chemical, a drug, a fuel, a poison, a preservative and a solvent. When you drink, most of the alcohol is quickly taken into your bloodstream. It then has to be burned up by your liver, or disposed of in sweat or urine. Alcohol has very different effects on people, but you should always remember that, even though it makes some people very chatty and lively at first, alcohol is a depressant — that is, it slows certain brain functions. It blunts your judgment and self-control, and even simple things like speech and co-ordination become difficult.

Why do people drink alcohol?

- ✗ to celebrate
- ✗ to be social
- ✗ to relax
- ✗ to be adult
- ✗ to escape from reality
- ✗ for medicinal purposes
- ✗ in religious ceremonies

How does alcohol affect the body?

- ✗ **The heart:** Alcohol increases the blood pressure and the heart rate.
- ✗ **The nervous system:** Alcohol acts as a depressant.
- ✗ **The liver:** Alcohol passes through the liver, and over time the liver becomes diseased and cannot function.



Profile of a teenage drinker:

Jackie Nelson, age 16

Interviewer: How old were you when you started drinking?

Jackie: Twelve.

Interviewer: Did you buy some yourself or were you given it?

Jackie: My friend's elder brother bought some beer for us, then we drank it outside the youth club.

Interviewer: Where do you drink?

Jackie: In the street and at parties.

Interviewer: How much do you drink?

Jackie: As much as I can get, because I like it.

Interviewer: What do you drink?

Jackie: Anything I can afford, or that anyone will buy me. Vodka and orange is my favorite, because it makes you drunk quicker.

Interviewer: Do you always drink in order to get drunk then?

Jackie: Yes, of course.

Interviewer: Has drinking ever got you into trouble?

Jackie: Yes. I've had a couple of fights and been told off by the police.

Interviewer: Does that worry you?

Jackie: Why should it? It's not as though I'm on drugs, is it?

Interviewer: Aren't you worried that you might become an alcoholic?

Jackie: That's what the doctor said. But it's a load of rubbish. I could quit anytime I wanted.

- ✗ **The stomach:** Small amounts of alcohol may help digestion; large amounts cause vomiting.
- ✗ **The skin:** Alcohol may cause your skin to feel flushed and warm, but in reality your body loses heat.
- ✗ **The brain:** Alcohol affects the way you speak, think and behave. The brain becomes damaged after years of alcohol abuse, producing disorders resembling senility or even psychosis.
- ✗ **Body weight:** Alcohol consists of "empty calories." It will increase your body fat without providing nutrition.

The cost of alcohol

- ✗ Thousands of alcohol-related deaths occur in every year.
- ✗ Hundreds of thousands of working days are lost due to alcoholism every year.
- ✗ People who are alcoholics are more likely to be unemployed.
- ✗ Heavy drinkers have three times the risk of cancer of the mouth and ten times the risk of dying from chronic liver diseases than non-drinkers.
- ✗ Fifty percent of murderers had been drinking at the time of the offense.
- ✗ Many car accidents are caused by people who have been drinking.
- ✗ Drinking can cause family fights, divorce, child and wife beating, poverty, absenteeism, road accidents and violence in the streets.

Questions for Discussion



Group discussions

1. Talk about what Jackie says. Suggest reasons why Jackie drinks so much. Do you think Jackie is in danger of becoming an alcoholic?
2. If you were Jackie's friend, how would you try to persuade Jackie to stop drinking?

Drugs

One problem that has become very serious in recent decades has been the misuse of narcotics, a particular type of drug that is used for recreational and not medicinal purposes.

Why do people take drugs?

- ✗ as an escape. Drugs help some people forget that they are lonely, depressed, unhappy, unemployed or poor. Some people claim that they offer an alternative when reality has become too threatening.
- ✗ because of peer pressure. If your friends take drugs, it can be very difficult for you to resist. People are afraid to be different.
- ✗ for excitement. Some people *want* to be different. Some are attracted to drug taking simply because it is illegal, just as children sometimes just like being naughty for the sake of it. Some think drug taking makes them different from — perhaps superior to — everyone else. It can be a way of asserting independence from parents, perhaps a way of hitting back at them.
- ✗ because they want to (despite the dangers). They become attracted by the alternative culture.
- ✗ because they are addicted. They are unable to stop taking the drug. There are two types of addiction:
 - **physical:** The body becomes dependent on the drug, as with heroin or nicotine.
 - **psychological:** Taking the drug becomes such a habit that, although the body can go without, the mind cannot. Psychological addiction can be just as powerful as physical addiction, and many who take drugs regularly want to stop but cannot.

What are the dangers of drug taking?

The main dangers are:

- ✗ having an accident while under the influence of drugs
- ✗ some drugs may depress or stop breathing
- ✗ accidental overdose may lead to unconsciousness or even death
- ✗ regular use can lead to addiction or dependence

Drugs can also have nasty side effects.

- ✗ They can bring on confusion or frightening hallucinations.
- ✗ They can cause unbalanced emotions or more serious mental disorders.
- ✗ First-time heroin users are sometimes violently sick.
- ✗ Regular users may become constipated, and women may cease to menstruate.
- ✗ Later still, there might be more serious mental and physical effects.
- ✗ If a drug user starts to inject, infections leading to sores, abscesses, jaundice, blood poisoning and even AIDS may follow.



An experience with drug addiction

This was the first time he had felt free from fear. After he had been persuaded to try the drug, an overwhelming sense of relief and deep happiness had come over him. He could not remember any time in his life when he had felt so free.

But the drug wore off and the fears came back. He could remember the awful day when he'd had to go up to the stage to fetch one prize after another. The hall had been packed with parents and school friends. He always had to do well. It was what his parents expected. He was their only son and they showed him off to relatives and friends. He was going to take on part of his father's business and was told he'd make a great success of that too. But what if he failed? Again the fear gripped him.

He was not going to become an addict. He could stop whenever he wanted to, but it was one way to freedom. Soon he needed to increase the amount he took to get the same effect. Then he tried other types of drugs. But this all had to be kept secret from his parents.

Upon leaving college they encouraged him to accept a girl in marriage. Quite soon there was a baby to think about and care for. With this came the fears that he would fail as a father. Eventually the drugs affected the way he ran the business and it collapsed. His parents disowned him and his wife threw him out.

Months went by until the pain of taking drugs was as great as the pain he was trying to avoid. At last he reached the point when he had to admit that he needed and wanted help.

He dragged himself to a drug rehabilitation center. He slept on the floor but remembered feeling more comfortable than he had been for months. He was given simple practical tasks to do, and regular discipline began to come back into his life. He began to talk and people understood. They didn't judge him. They accepted him and cared. ... There was plenty that needed to be changed in his life. The three people closest to him had been deeply hurt. He went to them so they could see the change in him. He admitted the wrongs he had done and asked forgiveness. Within two years he was back with his wife, they were expecting another baby and he was helping others find the freedom he had always longed for and had now found.



Why is taking drugs wrong?

Let us summarize the reasons why the abuse of all drugs — nicotine, alcohol, and narcotics — is wrong.

- ✗ It is self-destructive, a violation of our obligation to respect and care for ourselves, develop our potential, and not damage our future.
- ✗ Drug abuse almost always leads to some other wrong behavior such as lying, stealing, or recklessness and violence.
- ✗ Drug abuse causes much suffering to those people, especially families, who care about the drug abuser.
- ✗ Drug abuse, whether by minors or adults, contributes to an enormously destructive social problem.



Reaching your greatest potential

Every person has a vision of the future, of what he wants to be or what he wants to do with his life. Sometimes life is not easy, and we may find ourselves faced with seemingly insurmountable problems and pressures from every direction. It is at these times that a person is the most susceptible to behaving in a way he normally would not, including beginning to misuse drugs and alcohol. Other people, however, may only want to “try” drugs and/or alcohol to experience what people are talking about. However, this seemingly innocent interest can also rapidly lead to problems.

Even in times when you are struggling seriously or being pressured strongly by others, try to keep focused on the vision of who you are and the person you want to become. The potential that lies within you is not easy to develop and requires an exercise of will. You need to persevere through difficulties. All great people in history, without exception, were faced with difficult problems and suffering, and yet, by maintaining their personal integrity and using the challenges of life to grow, they became known by later generations as righteous people.

As funny as it may sound, you have the potential within to reach the level of greatness of all of those whom you admire. Perhaps with this vision of the kind of person you are becoming, you can even help your friends who may be faced with the same challenges.

For Your Journal



Imagine that one of your good friends has a problem with alcohol. He began drinking socially with your group of friends to feel more relaxed and free, but after a short time you noticed that he seemed to be behaving differently in school — sometimes falling asleep during class, other times being rude to the teacher, and some days not coming to school at all. You also noticed that he was not finishing his schoolwork, and that his marks on exams were getting lower and lower. You want to help him. He is your friend, and you can see clearly that he has a problem with drinking. What would you do in this situation?

CHAPTER 28

Christianity: The Life of Jesus

Christianity has spread all around the world during the past 2,000 years. Unlike the founders of the other world religions, whose lives were longer, Jesus taught publicly for only three years and died a criminal's death at the age of 33. Jesus did not leave any written works, and we have only a vague idea of what he looked like. Yet the Western calendar starts from the year of his birth, and people around the world, even those who are not his followers, celebrate his birthday every year.

Who was this person who affected the world so profoundly?

Many years after Jesus died, accounts of his life and teachings were compiled for posterity. These are called "gospels," meaning "good news." The earliest of these is thought to have been written about 50 AD, although some scholars date them much later. These gospels are the only sources that we have from which to learn about Jesus' life.

Background

The land into which Jesus was born was seething with expectation. In 63 BC the Roman Emperor Pompey entered Jerusalem, annexed Palestine and ended the Jews' short-lived political independence. From that time, a garrison of Roman soldiers was permanently stationed in Jerusalem. The Romans couldn't understand the Jewish religion, which seemed to them to be superstitious and primitive. They tried to replace it with Hellenistic culture, many aspects of which were deeply offensive to Jews. As a result, many Jews hated the Romans and there were often violent revolts.

In 40 BC Rome appointed Herod the Great, a cruel man of Jewish descent, king of the country. He continued the Hellenization of Palestine. Afraid that he would lose power, Herod filled the land with secret police and severely punished any Jew who aroused the least suspicion of political disloyalty. Suspecting treachery even at home, he murdered his mother-in-law, two sons and favorite wife. He tried to control the Jews by pitting different parties against each other. After he died, the country was divided among his sons, who were as unpopular as their father.

In 6 AD Jerusalem and Judea came under direct Roman rule. A series of procurators, or governors, was sent from Rome. These appointees were not of the caliber normally associated with Roman administration. They could not understand the Jews' stubborn resistance to Hellenistic religion and their loyalty to their faith. As a result, the Roman procurators needlessly provoked conflict and disturbances. The procurator Pontius Pilate, for example, took money set aside for sacrifices from the Temple treasury to finance the building of a new aqueduct. He also caused a riot by bringing military insignia bearing the emperor's image into the city of Jerusalem.

As time went on, more and more Jews were drawn into a group called the Zealots, who favored armed rebellion. They were fiercely nationalistic and opposed even the

payment of taxes to the Romans. From time to time revolutionary figures appeared who attempted to lead the people in winning their release from Roman rule. This rebelliousness culminated in a revolt against Rome in 70 AD, which led to the destruction of the Jewish state.

This was also a period of intense religious ferment. One group prominent in the New Testament is the Pharisees, a lay (non-priestly) movement which was creative, progressive and full of zeal and piety. Their leaders were called “rabbis,” or teachers. They had many new ideas such as belief in life after death, in angels and demons, and that there was a divine plan in history. They sought new ways to apply the Torah to the changing needs of the people. Their efforts, however, led to the endless multiplication of rules that few could follow and the accusation that the Pharisees were legalistic. Although they are often attacked in the New Testament, they are also portrayed as being sympathetic to the early Christians. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the party of the Pharisees became the basis for the Judaism that has continued until today.

Another important group was the Sadducees. They were the conservative, aristocratic, and priestly party which controlled the bureaucracy. The Sadducees were politically and religiously opposed to the views of the reform-minded Pharisees. They interpreted the Mosaic law literally and probably did not believe in life after death. After the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, they lost their influence and power.

In addition, there were many spiritual groups, the best known being the Essenes. They were a very strict religious community that lived in the desert. They rejected what they saw as the corruption of the Jewish faith by the priests who controlled the Temple. Instead of animal sacrifices, they offered a community meal. They considered themselves to be preparing for the coming Messiah, who would lead them not only in throwing off the Roman yoke but also in restoring the Kingdom of Israel.

Jesus' birth and youth

Living in an oppressive political environment that was also full of religious ferment, many Jews developed a strong expectation that God would do something to save them as He had in the past. They believed that another Moses would be raised up to lead them. This was to be the Messiah, which means “Anointed One.” The Messiah would free them from foreign oppression and would revitalize their religion. He would root out idolatry and sin and establish the kingdom of God worldwide. In this way political order, ethical perfection, economic prosperity and eternal peace would come to all humankind. The last prophet, Malachi, had spoken about the coming of the Messiah. However, he also had warned the people that if they were not sufficiently prepared for that day, they would be destroyed.

The Gospel of Luke opens with the story of an old priest, Zachariah, who was told by an angel that his childless wife, Elizabeth, was to have a son. One day when he was serving in the Temple, the angel Gabriel appeared to Zachariah and told him that his son would have a special mission. The old priest was dumbfounded and couldn't believe the angel. Nevertheless, in due course, his wife became pregnant and eventually gave birth to a son they called John. When he was born, Zachariah prophesied:

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him.

— Lk. 1:76

While Elizabeth was pregnant, her cousin Mary was also visited by the angel. Gabriel told her that she was to give birth to a son, Jesus, who would be called the Son of God, and who would sit on the throne of Israel and establish an everlasting kingdom. Mary was surprised because she was not yet even married. However, the angel told her what had happened to Elizabeth and assured her that God would fulfill his promise.

Mary was engaged to a carpenter, Joseph. When he discovered that she had become pregnant, he wanted to break off the engagement. However, an angel appeared and told him that the baby would save people from their sins and that God was behind what had happened. Joseph believed the angel and took Mary to be his wife.



Mary gave birth to Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem because there was no other place for Joseph's family to stay. Still, guided by revelation about the birth of an unusual baby, three wise men came and brought gifts to the newborn "king." King Herod, though, hearing about the birth of a "king," feared a new uprising and ordered all the baby boys in the area to be killed. Joseph and Mary were warned of Herod's intentions in a dream, and they escaped to Egypt with the baby. After the death of Herod, they returned and settled in Nazareth in Galilee, Joseph's home.

We know almost nothing about Jesus' childhood. We know that he spoke Aramaic, could read Hebrew and possibly learned Greek, as there was a large Greek city, Sephoris, not far from Nazareth. When he was twelve years old, the gospels record, his parents took him to Jerusalem for a religious festival. When they were already on their way home after the celebrations, they realized Jesus was missing. They went back to Jerusalem and three days later found him in the Temple talking with the religious teachers, who were astonished by the boy's wisdom.

A few years later, the Emperor Augustus, who considered himself to be a living god, died, and the throne was inherited by the suspicious and gloomy Tiberius. He appointed Pontius Pilate to be the sixth procurator of Judea.

At this time a young and fiery preacher, John, the son of Zachariah, was becoming more and more known in Palestine. John was an ascetic who lived in the desert fasting and praying, ate only locusts and wild honey and wore the most simple clothes. When he was thirty, he gave his first public sermon. Filled with righteous determination to bring his people back to God, he spoke about the necessity of repentance and about the Judgment that was to come soon: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mt. 3:2). From all around the country, religious leaders and ordinary people came to listen to John and be baptized by him in the Jordan River. Baptism represented the cleansing of sins and a new start in life; as water cleanses the body, so repentance purifies the soul. John, who by this time was called "the Baptist," told the people they should confess their wrongdoings and prepare themselves because the Messiah was coming very soon.

One day Jesus himself came to the river to be baptized. During the baptism, God revealed to John that this person from Galilee was the Son of God. John told those gathered around him about Jesus' identity, and immediately two of John's disciples

followed Jesus. John himself, however, continued to preach and baptize at the Jordan. Not long afterward, John was arrested and imprisoned by King Herod Antipas because he had criticized the king's adulterous behavior. John was later beheaded.

Jesus' early ministry

After being baptized, Jesus went into the desert to fast and pray for forty days before beginning his own ministry. From the desert he went to Judea and started to preach the gospel, the Good News — that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Mt. 4:17). This was the same message as John's. With a few disciples, Jesus also started to



baptize in the Jordan River, and many people went to him. When more people were being baptized by Jesus than were going to John, Jesus left Judea and went home to Galilee. He went through the towns and villages preaching in the synagogues and on the hills.

Having come back to his hometown, Nazareth, Jesus went to the synagogue to preach. All the people were amazed that the carpenter's son could speak so eloquently. However, they also were shocked by what he said, and they even tried to throw him off a cliff (Lk. 4:16-30).

Undaunted, Jesus traveled throughout Galilee preaching the good news of the kingdom. He preached in the synagogues, and the people were astonished by his righteous spirit and the power of his words. Crowds followed him wherever he went. He healed the sick and drove out demons (Mt. 8:28-33). Thousands of people gathered to listen to him, captivated by his words and marveling at his miracles. They recognized that, unlike other religious teachers, Jesus spoke with great spiritual authority and that even evil spirits had to obey him. A person couldn't simply listen to his words, since Jesus was calling on people to change their lives drastically. Jesus' message was very controversial. He preached a radical

obedience to God and the coming kingdom. His disciples had to give up everything — wealth, family, and friends — to follow him. He told the Jews to love their enemies, the Romans; he encouraged respect for the despised Samaritans; he elevated the role of women; and he challenged the religious, social and political orthodoxy of his day.

As Jesus traveled he gathered disciples. The first four were fishermen, the brothers Simon Peter and Andrew, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Later the tax collector Matthew joined them. Some Pharisees, however, were surprised that Jesus, a religious leader, associated with such sinners. Jesus told them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Lk. 5:31). Some time later, after spending a night in prayer, Jesus chose the others who were to be among the twelve disciples. They were Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon, Judas (the son of James) and Judas Iscariot.

The message of Jesus

Jesus spent a lot of time with his disciples. He taught them how to pray, how to love, how to deal with different situations and people. All this he taught through his

Sermon on the Mount

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

— Mt. 5:3-12

living example. Many times he withdrew from the hustle and bustle of his ministry to go to the mountains to pray. In response to his disciples' request, he taught them what we now call the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
— Mt. 6:9-13

Jesus gave them a new commandment which was to be the basis of their community: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn. 13:34-35).

He taught them that they should serve each other and not try to dominate one another. "The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Mt. 23:11-12).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus expressed the core of his teaching, which was to bring people love, harmony and the joy of oneness with God.

Jesus taught that true happiness is not brought about by power or money, and it's not the possession of the rulers of this world. Only those who open their hearts to love can inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Crowds come to Jesus

During the Galilean springtime all kinds of people came to Jesus. Apart from the crowds of common people, a centurion came and asked him to heal his servant, and Jairus, the ruler of

a synagogue, asked Jesus to bring his daughter back to life. Pharisees attended his meetings and invited him to their houses, listening to what he said attentively. Jesus had followers in every part of society. In fact, there were so many that he was worried. He could not look after and guide them all himself, and he still did not have enough disciples who could fully understand his teaching.

After a while he sent the disciples out two by two to preach the gospel. He warned them that they were to expect persecution but that God would always be with them to protect them. The apostles went through all the towns and villages, preaching and teaching the good news that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Like Jesus, they healed the sick and cast out demons.

Confusion around Jesus

People everywhere were talking and arguing about Jesus. People heatedly debated whether he was a prophet or even the Christ (the Greek word for Messiah). Despite the fact that during the first year of his preaching hundreds of people had come to listen to his sermons and be healed, little by little opposition began to grow.

One day when Jesus was teaching, a paralyzed man was brought to him to be healed. Jesus said to the man, "Your sins are forgiven." When the other religious teachers who were listening to him heard what he said, they were shocked. They



thought that only God could forgive sins. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” and to prove it he healed the man (Mk. 2:10).

The company that Jesus kept also scandalized the religious leaders. He associated with sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes. Some Pharisees accused Jesus because he healed people on the Sabbath, since for Jews any type of work on the Sabbath was forbidden. After a while, feeling jealous of the power Jesus had over people, they began to challenge his authority more and more. Trying to discredit Jesus’ work, they accused him of breaking the Mosaic Law. However, he always answered their questions and defeated them in argument. Many of the things Jesus said, though, were deeply

disturbing to the religious leaders of his time. When he said, “I and the Father are one,” they were so angry that they wanted to stone him. They said, “We are ... stoning you for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.” (Jn. 10:33). Jesus realized it was difficult for them to accept his teaching because it was so radical and challenging. But he pleaded with them to at least recognize that the good works and miracles he was doing were evidence that he had been sent by God.

As time went by, the confusion around Jesus increased. Crowds of people followed him and considered him to be their new Teacher. Some of his followers even hoped to make him their leader in the overthrow of the Romans. They started to proclaim him as the Messiah, although he had told them to keep this a secret.

The whole situation seemed to be getting out of control. Together with some of the Pharisees, the chief priests called a meeting of the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court. There they discussed what to do about Jesus. They were worried that if everyone came to believe in Jesus, the Roman authorities would be alarmed, treat it as a rebellion and crush the people once more. They decided that it would be better for Jesus to die than for the whole nation to suffer.

Followers leave

It was also becoming difficult for many of Jesus’ disciples to accept what he was saying, because it seemed to contradict the laws and traditions to which they were accustomed. One by one his followers left (Jn. 6:53-66). Even those who remained loyal found it difficult to understand what he was saying. Again and again Jesus tried to teach his disciples through parables, but it was difficult for the apostles to understand their hidden meaning. The crowds, who had been enthusiastic, started to drift away and abandon him. The heart of Jesus was filled with pain. He had come to tell people about love which they had not known before, love that could change their whole lives, but they didn’t understand. Filled with sorrow, he wept over Jerusalem and the sad destiny of his people, who didn’t know who he was.

Despite this, Jesus still continued to teach. However, the content of his sermons changed.

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

— Matt. 16:21

The first time he told this to his disciples, they were very surprised, because up until then they had only talked about building the kingdom of heaven together (Lk. 24:21).

Passion week

Jesus now set his face toward Jerusalem. It was one week before Passover, the Jewish feast celebrating the Exodus, the escape of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. Jerusalem was crowded with pilgrims.

When Jesus, accompanied by a throng of his disciples, entered Jerusalem, many people welcomed him warmly.

As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

— Lk. 19:36-38

The city was stirred up by such a triumphal entry, and people were talking about Jesus. Many followed him, while others were in violent disagreement. The Roman authorities and the chief priests were more and more afraid of a possible disturbance.

The next day Jesus went down to the courts around the Temple. When he saw that the area was full of merchants changing money and selling doves for sacrifices in the Temple, Jesus angrily drove them out. The next day Jesus went once more to the Temple, where he taught and disputed with the Pharisees and Sadducees. Again and again they tried to trick him into blaspheming, but each time he answered their questions so cleverly that they fell into angry silence. They tried to find a way to arrest Jesus, but they couldn’t do it openly because many people supported the prophet from Galilee. Fearing a revolt, they sought to seize him secretly.

Such an opportunity soon appeared. One of Jesus’ disciples, Judas Iscariot, had had some resentment against his teacher for some time. When the circumstances around Jesus became more difficult, he decided to betray him. He went to the chief priests and told them how they could seize Jesus when he was away from the crowds. For this they gave him thirty silver coins. But betrayal didn’t liberate Judas from his resentment. Later, realizing what he had done, Judas hanged himself.

The Last Supper

The next day, Thursday, Jesus and his disciples celebrated a Passover meal, now called by Christians the Last Supper. All twelve disciples were there. Before the meal, Jesus took a bowl of water and washed the feet of his disciples. They were embarrassed, feeling that they could not accept such service from their teacher. But even during the last evening Jesus was teaching them — not only with words but with his own life — how they should care for, serve and love one another.



He then shared the meal with his disciples in what became the basis for the Christian communion service.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

— Mt. 26:26-28

During the Last Supper Jesus for the first time talked openly about his imminent betrayal and death. About the one who was to betray him, Jesus said, "It would be better for him if he had not been born." (Matt. 26: 24)

Jesus' prayer and arrest

After the meal, Jesus and his disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. He told the disciples to wait for him while he prayed.

He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here

and keep watch." Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

— Mk. 14:33-36

But when he returned, he found his disciples sleeping. He woke them up, and at that moment the garden filled with voices and was lit up with lamps. Judas entered the garden with some armed guards. He went up to Jesus and kissed him to point him out to the authorities. Jesus was arrested, and the disciples fled.

Jesus was brought to the high priest Caiaphas. At a meeting of the Sanhedrin, which had gathered so as to find a reason to have Jesus put to death, nobody tried to defend him. He too was silent.

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

— Matt. 26:63-64

When they heard this, the chief priests were very angry and determined that Jesus should die. However, the Sanhedrin did not have the authority to execute anyone; only the Romans could do this. The Sanhedrin sent Jesus to be tried by the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate. Pilate examined Jesus but could find no reason to have him executed. He wanted to release him, but the religious leaders pushed for his death.

The Crucifixion and Resurrection

Jesus was flogged by the Roman soldiers and given a crown of thorns to wear. He was mocked as “the king of the Jews” and led out to a place called Golgotha. While carrying his cross, he was mocked and insulted. Weakened by the flogging, Jesus was unable to carry the cross, and a man in the crowd called Simon was pressed into carrying it. At the top of Golgotha, a hill just outside the city walls, Jesus was crucified between two robbers. Pilate had fastened to the cross a sign that read: *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*. Only his mother, Mary, and beloved disciple John were at the cross when he died.

Even when he was dying, Jesus didn’t condemn those who were killing him. Until the last moment of his life he loved the people, and he asked God to forgive them.

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.”

— Lk. 23:34

When evening came, a follower of Jesus’ known as Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus’ body, placed it in the tomb he had prepared for himself, and rolled a large stone across the entrance.

Early on Sunday morning some of the women who had followed Jesus went to the tomb, but found it empty. An angel told them that Jesus had risen from the dead (Mk. 16:5). They were very excited and ran to tell the disciples, who did not believe them. That evening, while ten of the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, Jesus appeared in the room (Jn. 20:19). Over the next forty days Jesus appeared to up to 500 of his followers (I Cor. 15:6). Each time he spoke to them, encouraged them and strengthened them in their faith. He taught them about their mission.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

— Mt. 28:19-20

After forty days Jesus ascended into heaven. Ten days later, when a large group of

disciples had gathered together, they were suddenly filled with the Spirit of God, and what appeared to be “tongues of fire” rested on their heads. From then on, the previously frightened, timid and cowed disciples had the courage to boldly and fearlessly proclaim the gospel. They went out to fulfill the commission Jesus had given them. Many were put to death, but they feared neither death nor any other threat. This was the foundation of Christianity.

Although it originated in Palestine, Christianity spread rapidly in all directions. In 988 missionaries were invited by the Russian ruler Vladimir I to Christianize Russia. Today there are three main forms of Christianity in the world, each with its own distinctive character. Although they had been growing apart for several centuries, in 1054 Eastern Orthodoxy formally split from Roman Catholicism. In 1517 the Reformation, initiated by Martin Luther in Germany, led to the development of Protestantism.



For Your Journal



Imagine it is the year 27 AD in Palestine. You are walking along a wide road, the sun is burning, the wind lifts clouds of dust. You are dressed in gray rags with a rope instead of a belt. A purse with a few jingling coins is hanging from your waist. You are walking with head hanging, watching your bruised and dirty feet wearily step along the road. Things are bad. You will have to spend your last few coins on candles, and at home there will be another argument. The quarrel you had in the morning with your neighbor and the insults he shouted are still resounding in your ears. You are full of resentment and anger, and there is no person in the whole world who will listen to you, understand you and accept you with all your sufferings, woes, and daily complaints. The Lord, the God of Israel, where is He, the promised and the long-awaited King, the Liberator? When will that morning come when you will be free of resentment, suffering and loneliness? When will all the dreams come true? No, you are not losing faith, but your people have been waiting for centuries.

At last you see the market on your left. A cart has passed you, loaded with olives and pots, then another one with watermelons; and here is a man riding an old mule. At last you approach the market. It is noisy and crowded, market-men are shouting, people are pushing. In a many-colored crowd you see the white garments of Pharisees hurrying to the synagogue. Roman soldiers pass by. You come to a little shop and push through the crowd of idlers who have gathered at the door. You have come here to buy some candles. And you are so sick at heart, you don't lift your head.

Attracted by a group of shabbily dressed people who are walking through the market, you turn your head to look at them. From their speech you recognize that some of them are fishermen from the seashore. They are talking together quietly. One of the fishermen addresses a man in their midst who seems lost in thought: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Even seven times?"

You notice the thoughtful man lift his eyes. His face is rather clear, and he looks at the crowd and for a moment his gaze rests on you. A ray of light suddenly seems to pierce your heart through the clouds of resentment. The man they are calling Teacher begins to speak. He speaks softly, but the force of his words makes everybody quiet. This wandering preacher seems to touch every heart. "Not seven but seventy times seven," he replies.

Intrigued, you listen as he tells a parable, and you feel your resentment and anger no longer. You would stay and listen to this Teacher, but the crowd that has assembled is dissipating.

Imagine you live at the time of Jesus and have a chance to meet him. How would you respond to him and his teachings?

Describe your encounter and your impressions of it.

CHAPTER 29

The Teachings of Christianity

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.

— John 14:6

To be a Christian is to be a traveler, spiritually always on a journey excavating the inner space of the heart. A journey without end. A journey toward and into the heart of God. “Blessed are the pure in heart,” said Jesus, “for they shall see God.” Made in the image of God, man knows God by knowing himself: Entering within himself, he sees God mirrored in the purity of his own heart. It is within the true and innermost self that there can be a direct meeting and union with God.

The greatest of all lessons is to know yourself; for if someone knows himself, he will know God; and if he knows God, he will become like God.

— St. Clement of Alexandria

The goal of the Christian life is to truly know God. This was also the goal for Adam and Eve, the first human beings. Having disobeyed God, they left the path that God had marked out for them. They became corrupt, and their sin prevented them from relating “heart to heart” with God. Their minds were darkened, and they no longer could hope to become like God as their passion for fleshly desires became stronger. Since then, all people have inherited this tendency to grow away from God instead of coming closer to Him. As they mature, many lose the strength to live up to a godly standard of life and reflect His image and love.

Since man could no longer by his own efforts attain union with God, God reaches out to man through the life of Christ. Christians believe that this is the primary reason that God sent Christ into the world. By uniting man and God in his own person, Jesus reopened the path to union with God. He showed what the true likeness of God was and set that likeness once again within man’s reach. Christ, the Second Adam, came to earth to reverse the effects of the first Adam’s disobedience.

Christ (Greek for “the anointed”) opened up the way back to God, and this is why one of the earliest names for Christianity was “the Way.” It is a path on which a Christian journeys, *a way of life*. The travelers along this way do not travel alone but in a community of like-minded people called the Church.

The Christian Church

Christians believe that the one God is a Trinity of three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Church, or the body of the believers, is understood to be the image of the Holy Trinity. In the Trinity the three persons are one, yet each retains his own identity. In the same way, in the Church many people are united, yet each preserves his personal individuality.

The Church is also seen as the body of Christ. Although he was crucified nearly 2,000 years ago, Christ was raised from the dead and continues to live and to work in the world. When Christ ascended into Heaven, he did not leave the Church. He continues to dwell in and guide the Church.

The source of the Orthodox faith is the Tradition, its sense of living continuity with the church of the Apostles. The Tradition is the faith that was imparted by Jesus Christ to the Apostles and has been handed down from generation to generation. It includes the whole system of doctrine, rules of Church life, worship and holy art which Orthodoxy has articulated over the ages. This Tradition, though, is not a mechanical repetition of what has been handed down or the mere intellectual acceptance of a system of doctrines. It lives in the Church because it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Tradition has been entered into so that it flows from within the life of a believer. It is his way of life. It has been said that, "The creed does not belong to you unless you have lived it."

The Bible

One of the main sources for the Christian faith is the Bible. The Church inherited the Jewish Tanach, which became known as the Old Testament, referring to the Mosaic covenant. To it was added certain books that became accepted as scripture by the Church and which are known as the New Testament, referring to the covenant established by Jesus Christ.

Returning home to God

One of the ways that Jesus taught was through parables. These are concise stories which are rich in spiritual truth. One of the best known is the parable of the Prodigal Son. It describes the human situation in which a person leaves his home, becomes dominated by desires, realizes his folly and returns to where he came from.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all that he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'" So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's

have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. “Your brother has come,” he replied, “and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.”

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, “Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours, who has squandered your property with prostitutes, comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him.”

“My son,” the father said, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” (Luke 15: 11-31).



There are many things to be learned from such a parable. Here are a few questions for you to think about and discuss:

- ✗ Why did the father give his share of the inheritance to the son?
- ✗ How would the son have felt if his father had denied his request and insisted he stay at home and work, since going away was wrong?
- ✗ What kind of friends did the son find when he left home?
- ✗ Did the son regret not listening to his father’s advice?
- ✗ How did the younger son change through his experiences?
- ✗ Can suffering have value?
- ✗ How did the father feel, and what was he thinking, while his son was away?
- ✗ Why was the father happy to see his son, even though he had squandered all his money?
- ✗ From a long-term perspective, which is more powerful, force or love?
- ✗ Why was the elder son so angry?
- ✗ When he was working on the farm all those years, do you think the elder son did so willingly or reluctantly?
- ✗ Did he love his younger brother? How did he feel toward him?
- ✗ How might the elder son have reacted differently?

This parable helps us to understand not only the way people wander off in their self-confidence, but also the darkness of despair they may come to feel as well as the joy of love regained. It also reveals the depth of heart in the relationship between God and a human being.

The way of the virtuous life

In a sinless world people would respond spontaneously and joyfully to God's love. In a sinful world, though, one in which we are separated from God, each person has to fight against deeply rooted habits and inclinations that are the result of sin. This is why one of the most important qualities needed by a traveler on the Way is faithful perseverance.

Such a life requires continuous effort and struggle in the exercise of free will. The problem is that, no matter how hard a person struggles, he cannot perfect himself

alone. He needs help. Christians believe that without God's grace a person can do nothing; but, without a person's voluntary co-operation, God will do nothing. For a person to be saved, both divine initiative and human response are required. Of the two, God's contribution is incomparably greater, but still, a person's participation is necessary.

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." These are the words with which Jesus started his ministry. Repentance is also the starting point of a Christian's journey. The word means "to change one's mind." It does not mean self-pity but rather the conversion and the re-centering of one's life on God. In repentance, while one may first look backward with regret, the result is that he looks forward with hope. When one repents, a new view is opened up — not of what we have failed to be but of what, by divine grace, we can now become.

When a person repents he wakes up. He is no longer in a spiritual daze, drifting aimlessly and buffeted by the influence of passing impulses. Instead, like the Prodigal Son when "he came to himself," after repentance a person possesses a sense of purpose and direction. He knows where

he has come from and where he is going. A person in such a state lives in the present. He is not re-living the past, thinking about it either with regret or pride; nor is he living in the future worrying about remote possibilities beyond his immediate control. He responsibly plans for the future, but only so far as it depends on the present moment.

As a person grows in watchfulness and self-knowledge, he begins to acquire the power of discrimination or discernment. This is like a spiritual sense of taste that enables him to distinguish the qualities of the different thoughts and impulses he has. He learns to tell the difference between what is good and what is evil, what is meaningful and what is unimportant.

He begins to take more notice of what is happening within his mind and heart. He learns to guard his heart, shutting out any temptations that come along. An important part of this is struggling with passions such as anger, jealousy, lust or



greed, which try to take over the soul. These passions were given to man by God, but they originally had a different nature. They became distorted by sin, and now they need to be restored. Uncontrollable rage must be turned into righteous indignation, and sexual lust into true love. In this way the passions are to be purified, educated and transfigured. Man needs to channel his passions toward goodness.

For example, love should be pure. Men and women who are not married should love each other as brothers and sisters. Sexual love is meant only for marriage. Impurity comes when the thoughts and feelings that belong in one sort of relationship start appearing in other relationships. This is what happens when feelings of sexual desire invade a friendship with a person to whom we are not married. We no longer think or feel the same way about our friend but develop a “hidden (or not so hidden) agenda.” Such sexual thoughts are a distraction and prevent us from having an open and wholesome relationship. This is why Jesus stated very forcefully:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

— Matt. 5: 27-28

The challenge, of course, is to put the Christian faith into practice. Jesus vividly described what happens when a person doesn’t practice what he knows.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

— Matt. 7:25-27

Jesus and the Law

Although Jesus came with a new message, he did not see himself as coming to abolish the Mosaic Law but rather to fulfill it. In Jesus’ day, many people were caught up in the letter of the law and had forgotten its spirit. They kept the rules but forgot the purpose of the rules. Jesus challenged them and explained the centrality of heart and love in life and the law. He told people they had to keep the law, but he wanted people to move onto the next stage in their spiritual life.

A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good — except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’ ” “All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

— Luke 18:18-22

Jesus taught that the whole of the Old Testament law could be summarized by two commandments.

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and

with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

— Mt. 22:36-40

This was the basis for all the commandments not to kill, commit adultery, steal and lie. The commandments were to protect the right to life, love, ownership and truth. Conforming to the law, though, was not enough. A person’s heart and motivation had to be right, too.

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

— Matt.5:21-24



Sometimes people are “self-righteous.” They have not killed anyone or broken any of the major commandments. However, they get angry with people, call them bad names, look down on others, bear grudges and hold resentments. In other words, their hearts are full of evil thoughts even if they do not follow them. This is keeping the letter but not the spirit of the commandment. Such ill feeling poisons the spirit and human relations, even if no one is physically harmed. Jesus explained that God would not accept a person’s offering if the person making the offering harbored hatred for another person. As a parent, God is not deceived by a child who is nice to Him but cruel to his brothers and sisters.

The commandment to love

Jesus taught and practiced the highest love. Love rather than law should be the basis of the Christian community. A person who loves does not even think about killing, stealing or lying. Laws against actions such as these were meant, as St. Paul said, not for righteous people but for criminals. It was love that was to bind Christ’s followers into unity with each other.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

— Jn. 13:34-35

The key is that we should love as Jesus loved — unselfishly and sacrificially. He loved people so purely that he was prepared to do and give anything for them. It was the same quality of love that God had when He was prepared to sacrifice what was most precious to Him.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

—John 3:16

Jesus was not only a mediator of God's love. He also freely sacrificed himself.

"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

— Jn. 15:13

And he taught people such sacrificial love that would embrace not only friends but enemies as well.

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

— Lk. 6:27-28

Jesus not only taught this, he did it. His life was the embodiment of his words. Even when he was on the cross, he prayed for those who were crucifying him:

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

— Lk. 23:34

Loving one's enemies

One of the most difficult of Jesus' sayings was about turning the other cheek and loving one's enemies.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

— Matt. 5:38-48

Let us think about this in terms of our own relationships. When we are treated badly, insulted or hit, how do we respond?

Recently a newspaper reported that a teenager had been shot to death by the angry owner of a summer home because the young person stole some flowers from his garden. Although this is an extreme example, tragically this kind of response is not unusual. People often retaliate and try to hurt another person so that he "will not do it again." This may take the form of shouting abuse or an act of uncalled-for violence. The ego of some people is so sensitive that they feel justified in destroying another person to maintain their own dignity. Unfortunately, even nations behave in this way, committing terrible atrocities in revenge for some incident. The Mosaic Law to which Jesus referred challenged such behavior and set a standard of justice that few people even today are able to meet.



Fortunately, not many people behave like the above example. Still, in human terms, loving one's friends and hating one's enemies may seem natural or even just. When we are mistreated, there are normally two ways we can respond:

- ✕ We can become angry and resentful. If the person is smaller or the same size as we are, we may respond in kind or at least look for a way to get our own back.
- ✕ If the person is bigger than we are and we are frightened, we may submit and do anything to avoid being hurt. We do what we are told and say what we are told to say.

Does either of these responses solve the problem of evil? The first can multiply it, leading to feuding. Both parties feel justified in the way that they behave, and the original cause of the conflict may even be forgotten. The second response can perpetuate evil by allowing the original injustice to go unpunished. The oppressor enjoys abusing his victim, whom he thinks doesn't deserve respect.

Jesus challenged people to go beyond justice and the "normal" way of living. Injustice occurs because of human selfishness and pride. Justice ensures that acts of injustice are compensated but does not necessarily cleanse the evil in the human heart. Solving this evil, the cause of injustice, was Jesus' concern.

Jesus' teaching about "turning the other cheek" is often misunderstood. It does not mean that you should let people take advantage of you. Turning the other cheek does not mean being passive in the face of evil. It does not mean compromising, changing one's opinions and pretending that what is evil is good. It does not mean losing self-respect and being weak and cowardly. "Turning the other cheek" means, firstly, that we should not respond to evil with evil. As a wit observed, "An eye for an eye, and soon the whole world will be blind." Instead, we should repay evil with good, and hate with love. This is active. It takes an intentional decision to embrace our enemies and demonstrate concern about their well-being because they are also God's children. This is certainly not easy. It takes enormous courage to love one's enemy.

When Christ told people to love their enemies, he challenged them with examples from their daily life. At that time, a Roman soldier was entitled to require any Jew to carry his belongings for one mile. You can imagine how annoyed a person might be when his lawful business was interrupted and he was forced to carry a soldier's heavy load, especially when that soldier represented an oppressive empire. Seething with anger and resentment, he would probably carry the baggage for not an inch more than one mile. Then he would let his burden fall and return to what he had been doing. Jesus told the Jews to do more than they were asked. He said they should gladly carry the baggage for two miles!

Imagine what would happen if you treated someone badly for no reason. If that person responded by treating you equally badly, you would realize that he was no better than you. If he became overly submissive and lost his dignity, you would lose

respect for him. But how would you feel if someone you mistreated reacted in neither of these ways? What if he didn't complain or become resentful, but instead embraced you and treated you with generosity and kindness? The more you would try to hurt him, the more he would love you. He would absorb all your hate and resentment and not return it. After a while you would have to recognize that he was a different kind of person and, in fact, was worthy of admiration. Your conscience and heart might be touched, and you would wish to have him as a friend, since he would be someone who would love you even when you behaved badly. You might even come to the point of apologizing and asking for forgiveness.

In this context how would Roman soldiers have felt if Jews went the extra mile? How would this have changed the relationship between Romans and Jews? And how would our lives change if we practiced this way of life?

CHAPTER 30

Forgiveness

All of us would like to be surrounded by kind, understanding, loving people. Certainly we would have no problems loving, helping, and supporting them. But what if a friend has offended us and become our worst enemy? Where can we find the courage to understand him, forgive him and, after overcoming the natural bitterness, to go on loving? How long must we forgive before yielding to the desire for revenge?

These questions are not abstract; we face them every day.

Below are a few real-life examples of people facing the need for forgiveness.

Some days ago I talked to my best friend, and foolishly poured out my whole heart to her. I really had to talk about my problem, and it didn't occur to me that next day my secrets would be known by the whole class. And you want me to forgive her? After such treachery?

Recently I came into my room and saw my mother with a pack of cigarettes in her hand that she had found while going through my school bag. She immediately began to shout, "You are 14, and already you smoke, and you are a liar, too!" I had those cigarettes by chance; I really don't smoke. But that is not the point. How could she go through my things without asking? And how could she feel she had every right to? I felt betrayed and indignant. No, I cannot forgive this.

I was born in the Caucasus and went to school there. The children in our class were of a dozen or more nationalities, and there were no problems, national ones at least. But then the war began, and suddenly people who had been neighbors for many years became enemies. Early on, my schoolmate's father was killed, and everybody was shocked. The whole class came to the funeral. No one thought some people should come and others shouldn't, based on nationality. But then a year passed, and now it seems as if our world is filled with hatred and anger. Even in our class there are fights almost every day. "Have you heard what your people did yesterday? You have always hated us!"





How much blood has already been shed! And everybody thinks of nothing but revenge! Of course, it is terrible when your relatives are killed, but can we change that by killing others ourselves? We are all people, aren't we? Hey, grown-ups! Stop! Somebody has to make the first step and forgive, or the bloodshed will never end. I know nothing of politics, and I don't want to find out which side started the killing, or who has more victims. I simply want to live and not to divide the world into Armenians, Jews, Russians, Georgians, Azerbaijanis. ...

"It is my fault. Forgive me if you can."

It is very difficult to think about forgiveness when we are discussing national or religious conflicts in which so much pain is involved and which will take many years to be resolved. Let us discuss other things first.

All of us have made mistakes and caused others pain. Before we learn to forgive other people, we should at least once experience the forgiveness of a person whom we have hurt. We should know what it feels like to be resented, to desire to make amends and to be reconciled to the person who has suffered because of us, and finally to be forgiven by them.

Two weeks ago I quarreled with my bosom friend. The worst thing is it was all my fault. I don't even know how it began. First, I just started to joke about his new infatuation. A new girl has appeared, but there is nothing really special about her. But Sergei is really crazy about her and thinks of nothing else. I simply can't bear to watch! So, Sergei began to say some nasty things back to me, and at some point I lost control and shouted so loudly that everybody could hear (which I normally never would have done), "And your father had an affair with his secretary and left you and your mother!" It was during the break, but there were many people in the class. Sergei went white, grabbed his bag and ran out into the corridor.

I don't know how it slipped from my tongue. A few days before, Sergei had told me about the situation at home. He is very much distressed about it, and it was terrible of me to have betrayed his trust. It's been already two weeks, and I'm at a loss to know what to do. To lose one's best friend in such a stupid way! I feel that I am the worst scoundrel. I have tried to make up for my mistake in different ways, but all in vain — Sergei just ignores me. It is as if I don't exist. It would be better if he beat me. I don't know what to do now. How can I prove to him that I really regret it? Will he ever forgive me?

Once you realize you have made a mistake, you cannot regain your peace of mind until the person you have hurt accepts your remorse and forgives you. Only in this way can the relationship be restored, allowing you to respect yourself again. Often it requires considerable effort on your part, but you are responsible not only for your actions but for their consequences too, so in such situations there is no one to blame but yourself.

If you have ever experienced the feeling of tremendous relief that comes when you are forgiven by someone you have hurt, it will be easier for you to understand and forgive others. All of us may face a situation in which there is nothing to hope for but the mercy of others.

For a religious person, this feeling of forgiveness and the accompanying peace of mind are the result of God's grace. God is full of grace and mercy. Where there is sincere repentance, we can always hope for His forgiveness. Then we will gain the strength to start again, without fearing that our past mistakes will forever trail behind us.

Forgiveness. What is it? Perhaps it is no more than the opportunity to try again, to do better, to be freed from the penalties and shackles of past mistakes. Whatever it is, it is something we all need and long for. That is why our hearts are touched and our eyes grow misty when we encounter truly great examples of it.

— Norman Vincent Peale
The Power of Positive Thinking

What forgiveness is

What happens when someone offends us? Besides damaging the friendship, it can make us resentful, so that our own soul suffers. We cannot calm down. We may repeat again and again to others how we have been insulted, and the feeling of alienation, of inner unhappiness goes on gnawing at our soul. Most of us can recognize this experience.

The following story is one of real pain and resentment. As you read through it, try to imagine how the writer could bring peace to herself and her situation.

Alla and I were childhood friends. Of course, we often quarreled, but never for a long time. After a quarrel one of us soon made the first step toward the other, our argument was soon forgotten and the friendship went on.

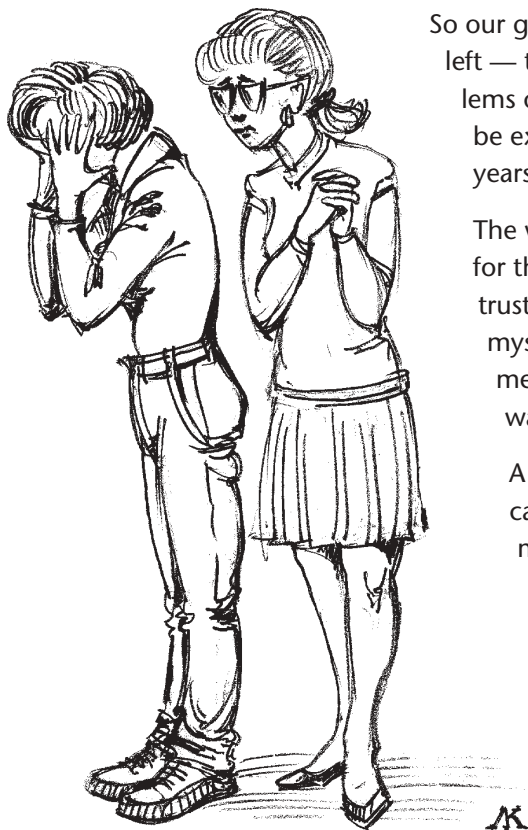
But about a year ago an event took place that broke our friendship forever, I'm afraid.

At that time I had serious problems with my parents. The thing is, during the summer I got acquainted with a group of kids. It was in the country. My parents seldom came there, and the way I was spending my time did not interest them. But when I returned to town, it turned out that they did not like my new friends. Mother demanded that I stopped meeting with "those ruffians" (she never called them anything else). And Father threatened that he would lock me at home and tell the militia about my friends, though we never did anything wrong.

Once, in the middle of all this, I was sitting at Alla's and complaining to her. The situation really was desperate. I knew that my friends differed from other young people only by their clothes and hairstyles. Actually they were good and kind. It was much more interesting being with them than with these sleek "businessmen" who can talk only about clothes and money. But how can I prove that to my parents?

One day Alla casually asked me, "And where do you gather?" Suspecting nothing, I told her everything. Two days later, when I ran to our cellar as usual, the door was sealed. I found out later that my dear daddy had come there with a policeman he knew. As a result, the cellar where we used to meet was sealed and my friends had a lot of trouble. But the point is, how do you think my father got to know about the cellar? No, he wasn't spying. My best friend, Alla, had told him everything!

This was the worst offense. I had trusted her completely. We knew all of each other's secrets. And then such treachery! How can I look my friends in the eye now? I am the one who betrayed them! (By the way, I had tried to introduce Alla to them several times, but every time she refused. She is rather reserved and maybe was scared of our noisy gatherings.)



So our group broke up, and I have nothing but pain and resentment left — toward my parents, but mostly toward Alla. Well, the problems of parents and children are as old as the hills. What else can be expected from them? But one's friend, a bosom friend for ten years?

The worst thing of all is that my character has changed, and not for the best. I've become reserved, and it is very difficult for me to trust people. Recently, while chatting with a classmate, I caught myself thinking, "I wonder what she is trying to worm out of me!" But of course she wasn't trying to find out my secrets; it was just an ordinary school chat during the break.

A year has passed, but I cannot forgive my former best friend. I cannot even listen to her. Several times she tried to approach me, to talk, but I pretended not to notice her. She doesn't even know how many people suffered because of her!

They say time is a healer, but my resentment only grows. What should I do? How can I learn to trust people again? Everybody seems to have forgotten this incident, but I feel as if I have a blunt needle in my heart which prevents me from living, communicating with people, making new friends.

What should one do? Wait until everything sorts itself out? And what if by then there are still no good feelings because they have been replaced by resentment and mistrust?

Let us think what forgiveness is and what it can bring us.

Forgiveness is the ability to put aside one's resentment and the wish to punish the person who made us suffer; it is the ability to overcome one's anger and look at a person with a fresh heart. Forgiveness not only releases the person who is the source of pain, but also relieves the victim of his suffering.

What will I gain by forgiving?

First of all, if you are wise and courageous enough to forgive a person who offends you, it will bring peace to your own soul.

All of us have quarreled at least once with those we love. How did you feel in such cases? You must admit that you felt unpleasant until the conflict was solved somehow — not just forgotten, but overcome by constructive efforts on both sides. Only then can the relationship be mended. Moreover, if we can forgive, we will become free to communicate with a very wide circle of people. We do not limit ourselves to relations with only those who love and understand us. The borders of our world are opened. We are not afraid of possible misunderstandings, because we are strong enough to understand and forgive people.

Besides the liberation of our own heart, forgiveness gives peace to another person. Each one of us has experienced more than once the pangs of conscience when we have done something wrong, hurt someone, and then understood our mistake. It is difficult to find the courage to apologize, and we fear being misunderstood or not accepted. In such a situation one can acquire inner peace only if the other person understands and

"He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me!" In those who harbor such thoughts hatred is not appeased.

"He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me!" In those who do not harbor such thoughts hatred is appeased.

Hatreds never cease through hatred in this world; through love alone they cease. This is an eternal law.

— From the Buddhist text
Dhammapada, 3-5

forgives. If we have such an experience ourselves, we will hardly want to increase another person's discomfort.

There is one more reason why forgiveness is "profitable." In a conflict situation, it is the only possible way of restoring the relationship. If our friendship is dear to us, we must understand that nobody is protected against mistakes, and if problems arise, it is necessary to understand them and then to forgive.

How do we forgive?

And if you excuse, and forgive ...
Allah is forgiving and merciful!

— Koran 65:14

But who forgives and mends — is
rewarded by Allah. For Allah does not
love the unfair! But, of course, those
who endure and forgive ... Really it is
from firmness in action.

— Koran 42:38, 41

We have named at least three reasons in favor of forgiving. The next question arises: How can we forgive?

The main requirement is being able to sincerely put aside one's resentment, for it is not the words we say that matter but our changed attitude and feeling for the person. If we forgive, it should be done simply, without any conditions, without expecting from the offender any humiliating proof that he has understood his fault. Forgiveness cannot be based on humiliation.

Having forgiven a person, you must not accuse him of the same thing again. Forgiveness implies that the past offense is forgotten, wiped out of your memory forever. Sometimes friends seem to have made peace, but after some time a new quarrel occurs, and it turns out that the past offenses are brought up again, showing that there was no real forgiveness. It is much

easier to forgive in words than to accept your offender with all your heart and never recall his past faults, no matter how intensely you quarrel.

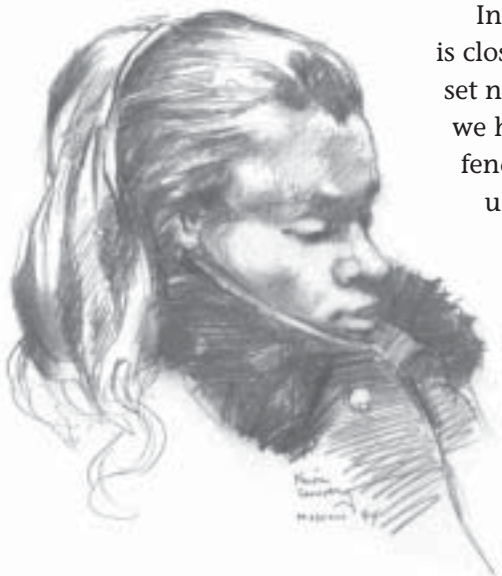
How do you set about becoming a forgiving person? First, you decide, by an act of will, that you are not going to be judgmental. We should refrain from judging, because we never have all the information that would enable us to be absolutely just. There are always some things hidden from us. Try to remember that each of us is subject to all sorts of strains and stresses that can be hidden from others but influence our actions and often push us to make mistakes.

Cultivating a sense of compassion and a conscious refusal to be judgmental are the first steps. Even so, these are difficult attitudes to achieve when you think you have been wronged. The instinctive, animalistic reaction is to fight back, to inflict hurt because you have been hurt.

If you want to experience the happiness, relief and well-being that come from forgiving, remember these three steps:

1. **Resist the temptation to be judgmental.** Remember, you do not know all the circumstances surrounding any event.
2. **Learn to be compassionate.** The best method is to use your imagination, put yourself in the other person's shoes and ask yourself whether the fault is entirely the other person's or whether there is some blame on your own part that needs to be honestly faced.
3. **Imagine the whole problem in terms of reconciliation.** Visualize the broken relationship healed. See yourself freed of the poisons of anger and resentment. Let your imagination suggest hopeful things you will accomplish with the increased energy that will come to you.





In speaking of forgiveness we must consider another concept which is closely connected with it — repentance. It is very important that we set no conditions for our forgiveness of someone. On the other hand, if we have done something bad ourselves, we mustn't expect the offended person to forgive us immediately. First, we must feel and understand the suffering we have caused to that person. It is best when both parties understand their faults, for there are rarely situations where everything can be divided into black and white. Even if you are offended, you should try to understand the motives of the person who hurt you. Maybe you were not sensitive enough and caused such an attitude toward you. If both parties are guilty, it is better for each to ask forgiveness of the other and not to try to dwell on "who started it all."

How many times shall we forgive?

We have understood why we must to be able to forgive, and how to do it best. But there is at least one question left: How many times must we forgive? Let us try to understand this by turning to one of the New Testament parables.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

"The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

"But he refused and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

— Matt. 18:21-35

What does this parable teach us? Each of us is far from perfect. All of us have evil inside, and all have made many mistakes, yet each time we want to be understood and forgiven. We all can recognize such feelings. Having done wrong, we may repent quite sincerely and promise that we will never repeat the same mistake, but after some time our courage and will may fail us and we may repeat the same mistake. We naturally hope to be forgiven again. If we hope for such tolerance, perhaps we should treat others in the same way and always forgive them with a fresh heart. There is no one in the world who has not committed a mistake. So why do we look at the splinter in our brother's eye and don't see the plank in our own? We all are apt to act like this, aren't we?

Forgiveness and repentance

In many cultures people have understood the importance of forgiveness. These two elements — sincere repentance for one's bad actions and the ability to forgive another person for the harm he has done — are the essence of human relations. They determine our ability to find a dignified way out of complicated or conflict situations. Let us look at forgiveness from the point of view of two of these traditions, Judaism and Orthodox Christianity.

Jewish tradition

According to the Jewish calendar, the New Year comes after the month of *Elul*, which is called the month of mercy and forgiveness. From the first day of this month, every day (except Saturday) after the morning prayer, in all synagogues a horn is blown. The sound of the horn makes people think, "The year is coming to an end. Look around. Have I committed actions this year of which I must repent? Have I harmed or offended anyone? It is not too late to make amends and with a sincere heart to apologize to them."

Elul is the time not only for repentance and understanding one's sins, but also for merciful forgiveness, making peace with everybody with whom one has had conflicts or quarrels. According to the Jewish tradition, during this time (as well as during the ten following days), God determines the fate of people for the next year. And only those who have been sincere in their repentance and forgiveness may hope for God's mercy, for being forgiven themselves, and for a good next year. The last day of this period is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when those people who already have

understood evil in themselves and overcome their resentment toward others can stand before God with a clean soul. "In your love you gave us this Day of Absolution to forgive and to excuse all our sins. ... O, listen, O forgive us this day which is coming to its end. Open the gates of Heaven to us before the gates of the Sun are closed" — with these words Jews address the Lord on Yom Kippur.



Orthodox Christian tradition

In the Orthodox Christian tradition there is also a day dedicated to the spirit of repentance, forgiveness and love of one's neighbor. It is known as "Forgiving Sunday", which occurs just before Lent. On that day, Orthodox Christians remember the words of Christ, "If you want your heavenly Father to forgive you, you must forgive those who have done you wrong." In fact, how can we expect anyone to forgive us if our own heart is full of anger, if we cultivate resentment? We cannot live together without forgiveness, for every person is always guilty toward others: husband toward wife, children toward parents, parents toward children, neighbors toward one another. We are people, living people, and if we cannot forgive, the world will become hell, a chaotic place full of ill will.

The Orthodox Christian tradition teaches that one should beg pardon of all people, for it can happen that we have offended someone without noticing it. The other person is suffering, and it is so simple for us to deliver him from this suffering by coming to him, talking it over, and begging his pardon.

You can see the importance of such traditions in our lives, no matter whether their roots are religious or not. However, it is hardly sensible to store resentment for the whole year, hoping it all can be solved in one day. It is much easier to overcome conflicts at once, without waiting for a petty quarrel to grow into a big tangle of new suspicions and offenses. Then your heart will be at peace and your life happier.

For Your Journal



Remember a situation when you felt offended. Describe it in detail in your journal. First express your feelings. Try not to hide anything. Describe honestly the most unpleasant feelings connected with the offense and the person who hurt you. Do you think your offender understands your feelings? Now try to imagine yourself in the place of that person and describe the same situation from his point of view. What is the difference between the stories? What do you think caused that person to behave the way he did? Did he offend you on purpose, or did he have some reasons to behave in such a way? What do you feel toward your offender now? Can you forgive him?

CHAPTER 31

A World of Good Actions

Jesus used parables, and not universal principles or the laws of human society, to address the inner self of each person. His contemporaries could recognize themselves in the characters of the parables, and the teachings, expressed in such a way, helped them to understand morality as a personal principle, to feel that each human life is valuable and that the heart of each person is more precious than blind submission to existing traditions and laws.

Jesus told parables in order to get ideas across to his audience in a way that they would easily understand; Jesus was an expert at taking ordinary situations and using them in this way. The Parable of the Good Samaritan teaches several lessons — about compassion, about righteousness, and about not holding prejudices toward those who are different.

After the death of King Solomon, in 926 BC his kingdom was divided into two parts, north and south. The northern kingdom, called Israel, was invaded and destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Much of the population was dispersed, and new peoples were settled in the land. In 587 BC, another empire, that of the Babylonians, destroyed Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah, and exiled the leading citizens. The people known in the Bible as Samaritans were the descendants of those Jews who had been left behind and intermarried with the foreign settlers. The Samaritans were universally despised by the Jews of Jesus' day because they were of mixed blood, did not worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, and, although they accepted Moses and the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Torah, or the Old Testament), did not accept the writings of the Prophets who came later. The Samaritans in turn insisted they were the true descendants of Abraham. This mutual hatred often took violent expression as Jew and Samaritan attacked each other.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind,' and 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' "

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"



In reply Jesus said: "There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him and beat him, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came there, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by on the other side. But a Samaritan who was traveling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then the Samaritan put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Take care of him,' he told the innkeeper, 'and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else he requires of you.' " And Jesus concluded, "In your opinion, which of these three acted like a neighbor toward the man attacked by the robbers?" The teacher of the law answered, "The one who was kind to him." Jesus replied, "You go then and do the same."

— Luke 10:30-37

Something to
think about



- What does it mean to be a good neighbor?
- What criteria did Jesus use to define righteousness — belief in certain doctrines, following certain traditions or actions?
- Why do you think the priest and the Levite (a member of the priestly tribe of Israel) did not come to the victim's aid?
- What does this parable teach us about helping those whom we don't know and loving our enemies?
- What do you think the Samaritan had to overcome to help the injured Jewish traveler?
- How do you think the traveler felt about Samaritans afterward?

Compassion is a way of looking at the world from the perspective of another person. In solidarity with other human beings, we see their joys as our joys, their pain as our pain. We see other human beings as offering something of themselves to us, as well as receiving from us. This can happen between brothers and sisters, spouses, parents and children, friends, classmates, co-workers, and even with strangers to whom we have no apparent connection.

What determines a person's righteousness?

Let us think about righteousness. Maybe some of you will think this word obsolete or for you it has negative connotations. For instance, throughout the centuries many religious people believed that only believers of their own religion could be called righteous, while everyone else wallowed in the darkness of ignorance and sin. In the last century, the Nazis held to the idea that a person should be judged according to his race. People were divided into several categories, and to each of them special criteria were applied which justified treating some as animals, or worse. However, these examples are those of 'self-righteousness'— not true righteousness.

Then, what are the criteria for true righteousness? The parable about the good Samaritan tells us that nationality or religion do not matter for "inheriting eternal life": in order to be considered righteous in the true sense one must be a moral and loving person in his actions, in his attitude towards people – all people, not only those one happens to like.

The first step towards righteousness is to adopt a mature, moral outlook. But we cannot stop there, because the best ideals lose their power when we don't apply them in life. Not without reason was it said that faith without actions is dead (James 2:26). Our Ideals must be manifested in our words and actions, and on a deeper level determine our motives and our very state of mind.

It is important to realize how universal our ideals are, so that we don't use a double standard of morality in judging people, be it consciously or not. We might apply one standard to one group of people (those of the same nation, age, company, etc.), while to others we apply a different standard. Often our logic runs like this: This person is like me, so he is good; if he has done something bad, it must be a mistake, worth understanding and forgiving. But if the same action is done by a "stranger", he has only confirmed his evil nature by it. Or the same good action of two different people may be judged differently – in one case as a manifestation of love and compassion, in another – as manipulation.

Another mistake we are apt to make is to point out the faults of others while turning a blind eye to the very same problem in ourselves. If we have a bad relationship with a classmate, we tend to turn our sense of disgust toward the whole person. It seems to us that he is rude, egocentric, slovenly dressed, rebellious... In short we see nothing but shortcomings in him, but the problem may really be in ourselves.

There is a boy by the name of Victor in our class. I have always thought him boring and arrogant. He's always showing off in front of the girls, and tries to make fun of me. He begins with some "clever" talk to show he is grown-up and well-read and that I am just an ignoramus. At a literature lesson he makes such comments that everybody understands his only aim is to make fun of me. I have tried to ignore him because I've always thought him an egoist, and did not like him much. Then recently I discovered that for more than a year twice a week Victor has been visiting one of our old teachers who is now retired. Two years ago she broke her leg and now can hardly walk. Besides all that she lives alone. So Victor brings her food and spends time with her. And no one – no one! – knows about it.

At first I couldn't believe it. Suddenly I began to see Victor as if he were two different people. What is he really like? Honestly, as for me, I would hardly have the patience to spend so much time with a teacher in such a situation. Why did I see him only as arrogant and egoistic? Maybe I have been wrong all this time. I have always tried to ignore the fact that many classmates like Victor for some reason. Have they seen something in him that I never noticed?

We have all come across situations in which a person we treated in not such a good way turned out to have a completely unexpected side. Such cases should Impel to us think of more universal criteria for determining righteousness. It doesn't really matter whether the person likes me or not; the important thing is his general behavior, the extent of his sincerity, his ability to sacrifice, the selflessness of his actions, his desire to do good to other people. If, while making relationships with people around us, we can be guided by such universal criteria, we can avoid many problems in our adult lives. Many conflicts, Including world wars, began because one group of people had the wrong idea about another group, made them Into an enemy or an inferior race, and acted upon this misconception.

The Golden Rule

The Parable about the good Samaritan teaches us that the criteria of goodness is determined by the needs and aspirations of others. In order to apply this criteria, it is necessary that we learn to notice when others need our help, to feel their pain and suffering. Compassion, sympathy and empathy – these are the most important

features of a good person. But It is still not enough because it is also necessary to learn *how* to help— In other words to give help appropriately.

Leo Tolstoy wrote a wonderful story about misbegotten help. A hermit and a bear made friends with each other. One day the hermit fell asleep and flies started disturbing him. The bear was trying to drive them off, but without success. He got angry, took a stone and threw it at a fly on the hermit's forehead. He killed the fly, but also the hermit's forehead was smashed. The trouble Is that our own shortcomings often get In the way of our attempts to help others.



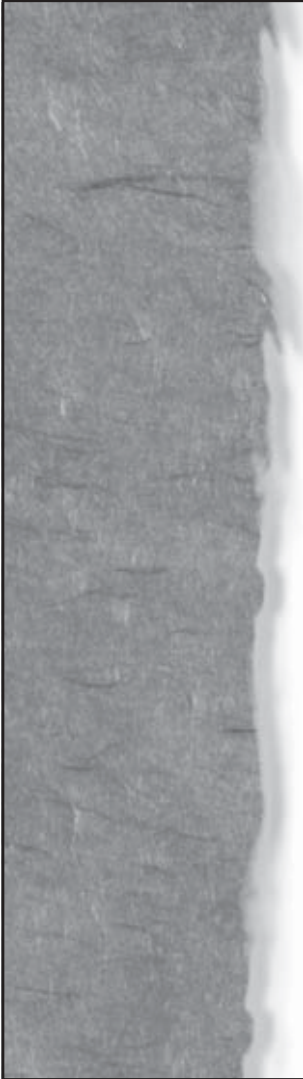
The parable reveals the unselfishness of truly good actions. The Samaritan does not reason what king of profit he will gain from his help. On the contrary, he unselfishly sacrifices his wealth for the sake of a stranger. Do you agree that to do this is much more difficult than helping your relatives, friends, or an acquaintance – to help someone you do not know without expectation of anything In return?

Of course, Christian teaching underlines that good actions will be rewarded by God. But truly good deeds are done purely for the benefit of others. If someone does

something good being motivated by an expectation of a reward, he can hardly be called a moral person (although in the eyes of other people he may appear so). In the past, communist “Pioneers” were assigned to help old people, whom they visited and assisted in whatever way they could. But often it happened that they helped only “their” old person, refusing to help anyone else. This is a good example of a distorted understanding of the essence of good actions! Our actions are truly good only when we help sincerely with a pure heart.

There is an ethic that says we should love ourselves more than others. We should differentiate such an ethic from common selfishness. In this case we are talking about a person’s right to take care of his needs, without violating the norms accepted in society. Therefore, this is the ethic of self-reliance, which is the norm of modern society. But we should understand that we are capable of doing much more than that—of helping those who are more unfortunate than us, without bringing harm to ourselves.

Good actions are an expression of our character. They are also the way to self-perfection, the way to develop a personality of full value. There is one way sure way of becoming a good person—to make good actions with a pure motivation. Of course, in the beginning it may be difficult to live this way. At times, we may have to force ourselves to go against our ‘natural’ Inclination, but eventually, we will find that it becomes quite natural to love others. Doing good deeds without having to be persuaded or forced brings the greatest joy, and this stimulates us to do other good actions. In this way, goodness starts to become a feature of our character.



Mercy in the Sand

From Taking Flight: A Book of Story Meditations,
by Anthony de Mello

A family of five were enjoying a day at the beach. The children were bathing in the ocean and making castles in the sand when in the distance a little old lady appeared. Her gray hair was blowing in the wind. Walking along in humble clothes, she was picking up things from the beach and putting them into a bag.

The parents called the children to their side and told them to stay away from the old lady. As she passed by, bending down every now and then to pick things up, she smiled at the family. But her greeting wasn’t returned.

Many weeks later they learned that the little old lady often came out to the beach to pick up bits of glass so children wouldn’t cut their feet.

Compassion is a way of looking at the world from the perspective of the other person. In solidarity with other human beings, we see their joys as our joys, their pain as our pain. We see other human beings as offering something of themselves to us, as well as receiving from us. This can happen between brothers and sisters, spouses, parents and children, friends, classmates, co-workers, and even with strangers to whom we have no apparent connection.

CHAPTER 32

Non-Violent Change

Often when we look around us, we become aware that the world is not the way we would like it to be. Everywhere there seem to be problems. Many things happen that we feel are wrong or unjust — either at home, at school, or in the wider world. What should we do? On the one hand, it is tempting to distance ourselves from what goes on around us and just concentrate on our own lives. On the other hand, it is tempting to busy ourselves in reforming everything except ourselves.

Historically, people who have had strong feelings about something often have resorted to violence to put things right or to seek revenge against the perpetrators of injustice and oppression. Others have questioned the use of violence as a means to solve disputes and bring about change.

Non-violent resistance to evil

Among Russian thinkers who taught the principle of non-violent resistance to evil, Leo Tolstoy has a special position. Here is how he expressed his views on this issue in the book *Way of Life*, which he wrote during the last year of his life:



The teaching of non-violent resistance to evil is not some new law; it only indicates the mistake people make when falling away from the law of love; it only indicates that any permission of violence against neighbor for the sake of revenge or in order to save oneself or one's neighbor from evil is incompatible with love.

No violence can bring peace to man, it will only irritate him. And that's why it is obvious that only non-violence can change the lives of people.

The false assumption that some people can fix the lives of other people by violence is especially harmful, because those who follow this assumption cease to differentiate between good and evil.

If there was raised a question, what is the way to free oneself completely from any moral responsibility so that one would act in the most evil way without feeling any guilt, then there would be no better means than the prejudice that violence can bring happiness to people.

It's difficult to argue with these words. At the same time, all of us understand that it is one thing to preach just and noble principles, and another to put them into practice. There is an inevitable question: Is it possible to follow noble ideals and bring about real change, not only in one's own life but also in a society in which injustice rules?

In our century, two men who were deeply influenced by the writings of Leo Tolstoy, one an Indian and the other a black American, led movements to bring about change without the use of violence. One, Mohandas Gandhi, led the movement that won his country's independence. The other, Martin Luther King Jr., inspired a movement for civil rights. Neither lived by the sword, but both were assassinated. Still, the changes they helped to bring about have had a profound, lasting and beneficial impact on their societies.

Mahatma Gandhi

Mohandas Gandhi, who is generally known as Mahatma ("Great Soul") Gandhi, was born in West India in 1869. Although he was raised in the Hindu tradition, the main religion of India, he firmly believed that wisdom is within all the great religions, and his ideas reflect his eclectic use of spiritual traditions along with his own. As a child he was deeply influenced by Jainism's teaching of *ahimsa*, which emphasizes hurting no living creature. Jains, of a religious tradition that began in India at the same time as Buddhism, believe that each person should develop within himself the conviction that injuring someone else is morally repugnant and should seek to

eliminate this desire. From Hinduism Gandhi absorbed the teaching that enduring any suffering could bring one to either a victorious or an unsuccessful end. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount also impressed him. After sincere study and reflection, Gandhi sought to discover the universal truths behind these spiritual teachings by living them out in daily life. He wanted to reduce all the principles he believed to practice.

Gandhi studied law in England and became the legal champion of the Indian community there, before moving to South Africa. In South Africa

the races were separated by law. Black Africans and Indians were treated as second-class citizens. They had few rights, and even those could be easily revoked or disregarded. For example, only white people were allowed to travel in the first-class compartments of trains. Gandhi experienced this firsthand when he was evicted from a train. In the face of such injustice, he realized that he could either "go back to India or go forward with God as my helper, and face whatever was in store for me. I decided to stay and suffer. My active non-violence began from that moment."

Gandhi firmly believed that non-violence is the law of the human species, as violence is the law of the brute. Many times during his life Gandhi was faced with the choice to practice his true humanity. When he was beaten and imprisoned, facing unjust treatment, he never fought back with violence, insult or injury to his persecutors.



Gandhi taught the Indians that they could gain their proper rights by refusing to cooperate with the South African authorities. Such tactics, though, were not without physical danger. Although badly beaten and almost lynched by white thugs, Gandhi refused to prosecute them. Many times he was thrown into jail, and his followers suffered as well. During this period he was encouraged by the essay “Civil Disobedience” by the American essayist Henry David Thoreau, which stated that a person must obey his conscience, even against the opinion of his fellow citizens, and even if it means he will be imprisoned. Gandhi also corresponded with Count Leo Tolstoy and was influenced by his ideas on non-violence. However, Gandhi did not affirm unconditional pacifism. He later supported Britain in the First World War against Germany and in the Second World War against fascism.

Throughout his life Gandhi taught his followers the importance of human dignity and of non-violent resistance to unjust government treatment and policies. At the end of his campaign the South African whites agreed to a compromise that Gandhi himself had worked out.

Satyagraha

The basic principles on which Gandhi based his life follow the central idea of *satyagraha*, a Sanskrit word meaning “devotion to truth.” If one always does the true thing, one will be supported by the moral universe. Results from true decisions and behavior would flow naturally; therefore, he did not fret over the results of his activi-

ties. He encouraged others to be confident in aligning themselves with the side of truth and justice. The same moral law that permeated the universe applied to the lives of individuals, groups and nations as well.

Gandhi’s philosophy and way of life of non-violent civil resistance developed out of this devotion to truth. He advised citizens not to cooperate with the authorities and to refrain from submitting to any order out of fear or anger. Likewise, Gandhi warned against harboring ill will toward assailants or unjust leaders. Active non-violence required the practitioner to absorb anger and assaults without retaliation. Even swearing under one’s breath was against the principle of non-violent resistance. When authorities used force in an attempt to secure the obedience of the people, Gandhi said:

We will match our capacity to suffer against your capacity to inflict suffering, our soul force against your physical force. We will not hate you, but we will not obey you. Do what you like, and we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. And in the winning of the freedom we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you over. So ours will be a double victory; we will win our freedom and our captors in the process.

When he returned to India in 1919, Gandhi became involved in the movement to win India’s independence from the British Empire. Until then, the independence movement had grown underground, manifesting itself in bombings and other acts of terror. Though he had no formal position, Gandhi soon became the leader and guiding spirit of the movement. He

brought the hatred which people had been holding within for many generations to the surface and made the movement completely open and public. He inspired Hindus

Devotion to truth is the sole reason for our existence. All our activities should be centered in truth, which should be the very breath of our life. Once this stage in the pilgrim’s progress is reached, all other rules of correct living will come without effort, and obedience to them will be instinctive. But without truth, it is impossible to observe any principles or rules in life. Generally speaking, observing the truth is understood to mean truth in what we say, but there should be truth in thought, truth in speech, truth in action. Everyone should follow truth according to his own principles. Indeed, it is one’s duty to do so. Then if there is a mistake on the part of anyone so following truth, it will automatically be set right. The quest for truth involves suffering, sometimes even unto death. There is no place in it for even a trace of self-interest. In such a selfless search for truth, nobody can lose his bearings for long. Directly one takes to the wrong path, one stumbles, and is thus redirected to the right path.

— Gandhi



and Muslims to work together and advocated a policy of non-cooperation with all British organizations in India. At times the British reacted violently and many people were killed.

Means and ends must be consistent

Although his country's independence was important to him, Gandhi was determined that India would win its freedom by truth and non-violence. He would not use an incorrect means to gain a moral end, for he knew that the means are contained in and determine the end. Means and methods must be consistent with the goal of such action.

Still, there were people who were not able to fully embody the principle of non-violence, and there were tragic violent incidents. As the instigator of the non-cooperation campaign, Gandhi was sentenced to six years imprisonment, of which he served two before being released in 1924 following a serious illness.

When there were occasions of serious violence or rioting, Gandhi often would fast for up to 21 days. He explained the reason for such fasting as follows:

I launched non-cooperation. Today I find that people are non-cooperating against one another, without any regard for non-violence. What is the reason? Only this, that I myself am not completely non-violent. If I were practicing non-violence to perfection, I should not have seen the violence around me today. My fast is therefore a penance. I blame no one. I blame only myself. I have lost the power wherewith to appeal to people. Defeated and helpless, I must submit to His Court. Only He will listen to me, no one else.

He also fasted to touch the conscience of people so that they would change.

But what should a non-violent person do when he finds his friends, relations, or countrymen refuse to give up an immoral way of life, and all arguments prove futile to evoke any response? Such a person must not use a semblance of force to convert the wrongdoer. He even eschews the use of harsh language. The first step is gentle and affectionate persuasion. When it fails to produce any salutary effect, voluntarily he accepts suffering in his own body to open the eyes of the person who is determined to see no light.



When a Christian asked him if fasting in this way was itself a form of coercion, Gandhi replied, "Yes, the same kind of coercion which Jesus exercises on you from the cross."

Gradually the movement matured and grew. Hundreds of thousands participated in the campaign by marching, praying, striking, going to prison and fasting. In this way the resisters did not use violence or injury to the authorities during their protests, but simultaneously withstood the injustices inflicted upon them by the government.

Gandhi appealed to the conscience of the British, since they claimed to be running their empire on moral principles. His successful use of non-violence depended partly on the fact that his opponents in the end were forced to ask whether their own behavior fitted their deepest moral convictions. Eventually,

Gandhi's movement touched the conscience of the British, which allowed India in 1947 to become an independent state.

Gandhi was assassinated in 1948 by a militant Hindu who disagreed with non-violence and wanted to establish a Hindu state with force if need be. Gandhi's martyrdom, however, meant that his assassin's policies were strongly condemned and discredited.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, in the heart of the American South, where until the Civil War of 1861-65, black people worked on plantations as slaves. Even after the U.S. Congress abolished slavery in 1865, black



people were not treated equally and in many places in the South legalized discrimination prevailed. Black people were segregated from whites in public places. They had to use separate toilets and water fountains, stay in separate hotels, eat at separate restaurants, and were expected to give up their seats on buses to white passengers. Black Americans went to separate schools, and in some places they did not have the right to vote.

King was born into a family where both his father and his maternal grandfather were Baptist preachers. He received a Ph.D. in theology from Boston University in 1955. During his studies he met a music student, Coretta Young, who became his wife and bore him four children. King was painfully aware of the racial discrimination in American society, and as a Christian he believed that the only way to achieve equality was by non-violent and peaceful forms of protest. He had been profoundly impressed by Mahatma Gandhi and in 1959 visited India and discussed *satyagraha* with some of Gandhi's followers.

In 1954 King became pastor of a Baptist church in Montgomery, Alabama. At that time black and white people were officially kept apart on Montgomery buses.

Blacks were restricted to the seats in the back of the bus and were expected to give their seats to whites if the need arose. On Dec. 1, 1955 a black woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a public bus to a white passenger. She was arrested.

King helped set up the Montgomery Improvement Association to have the law changed. The association decided to boycott the city transport system. For 381 days black people did not use the buses. Instead, they organized their own transportation with voluntary car pools or they simply walked to their destinations. Although King's house was bombed and he and other ministers were violently abused, King was determined to keep Gandhi's teaching to meet violence with non-violence. In the end, the law was changed and the boycott stopped. King later described how such non-violent direct action worked:

Non-violent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue; it seeks to dramatize the issue so that it can no longer be ignored.

By deliberately appealing to the conscience of white Americans, King sought to challenge unjust laws that gave whites greater privileges and positions in American

We shall not fully understand the great meaning of Jesus' prayer unless we first notice that the text opens with the word "Then." The verse immediately preceding reads thus: "And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, the other on the left." Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them." Then — when he was being plunged into the abyss of nagging agony. Then — when man had stooped to his worst. Then — when he was facing a most ignominious death. Then — when the wicked hands of the creature had dared to crucify the only begotten Son of the Creator. Then said Jesus, "Father, forgive them." That then might well have been otherwise. He could have said, "Father, get even with them" or "Father, let loose the mighty thunderbolts of righteous wrath and destroy them" or "Father, open the mighty floodgates of justice and permit the staggering avalanche of retribution to pour upon them." But none of these was his response. Though subjected to inexpressible agony, suffering excruciating pain, and despised and rejected, nevertheless, he cried, "Father, forgive them."

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

society. His home, person and family were threatened, and he was imprisoned after protesting with 33 others against separate eating facilities for blacks and whites in an Atlanta shop. Police with dogs and on horseback attacked him and his followers as they demonstrated. He was jailed again in 1963, together with a large number of his followers, but remained convinced that his tactics were right.

In the civil rights movement many whites fought alongside their black neighbors for the rights of blacks within America, some even at the cost of their lives.

King knew that his tactics of non-violence would not create immediate change. Militant black leaders, who wanted to pursue change through violent means, accused him of not being firm enough. But King had a deep faith that only non-violence would bring real and lasting change. He was also belittled and criticized by the more conservative leaders of the black community, who thought he was too radical. But King felt that "One of the great tragedies of life is that man seldom bridges the gulf between practice and profession, between doing and saying." He closely followed the biblical teaching of overcoming evil with goodness, and he affirmed that evil could never be overcome by evil, but only by love and goodness. He believed that he and his followers should emulate the example of Jesus Christ.

Love your enemies

King was very practical in his advice and guidance, since he spoke and wrote from his own experience. In a sermon he addressed the question "How do we love our enemies?":

- ✕ First, we must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love... Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on an evil act. It means, rather, that the evil act no longer remains a barrier to the relationship. Forgiveness is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a new beginning.
- ✕ Second, we must remember that the evil deed of the enemy-neighbor, the thing that hurts, never quite expresses all that he is. An element of goodness may be found even in our worst enemy.
- ✕ Third, we must not seek to defeat or humiliate the enemy but to win his friendship and understanding.

To the more theoretical question, "Why should we love our enemies?" he explained:

- ✕ Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.
- ✕ Hate scars the soul and distorts the personality... Hate is an evil and dangerous force... (that) brings irreparable damage to its victims... But... hate is just as injurious to the person who hates... (It) corrodes the personality and

eats away its vital unity. Hate destroys a man's sense of values and his objectivity.

- ✕ Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend. We never get rid of an enemy by meeting hate with hate; we get rid of an enemy by getting rid of enmity... (As Abraham Lincoln said,) "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?"



King knew that once black men and women began to demand their rights in a non-violent fashion, their own feelings of self-respect would be enhanced. As he said, "The non-violent approach does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self-respect. It calls up resources of strength and courage that they did not know they had." He claimed that any form of violence would bring instant downfall to the efforts of the black community in their fight for equality within society. As one biographer wrote,

By making a virtue of a necessity — any resort to violence on the part of the blacks would be suicidal — he reinforced the claim of black southerners to represent a superior morality to that of the white racists.

In 1963 King was joined by more than 250,000 Americans, black and white, in a march to Washington, D.C. The peaceful demand for human rights resulted in the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In 1964 King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1968 he planned a march to Washington on behalf of poor people but first visited Memphis, Tennessee, to show his support for the city's striking sanitation workers. There, on April 4, he was assassinated. Preaching the day before in Memphis, he had declared:

I've been to the mountaintop and I've looked over and I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know that we as a people will get to the promised land. So I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

Something to think about



- Do you see any situations in the world that could be improved through organized non-violent resistance such as took place in India, South Africa and the United States by the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.?
- Do you agree with the philosophy behind non-violent resistance? Imagine that you were from a group of people who were oppressing others. Would this change your mind about non-violent resistance?
- Why do you think that the tactics used by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King were so successful and that both men became legends in their time?
- Is there anything that strikes you as being of particular importance in the philosophy of one of these two men?

For Your Journal



Imagine that you are a black American following Martin Luther King Jr. during the 1960s and you have just been imprisoned for participating in a non-violent protest. Although you were treated unjustly, you never retaliated with violence or even verbal abuse against your oppressors. You are now in prison and you are about to write a letter to your family, who do not believe in your philosophy of non-violent protest. Explain to them why you practice these principles and either defend non-violent protest by showing the good it has done, or refute the principle by showing that it has done harm.

CHAPTER 33

Respect and Tolerance

Respect

As we grow up, we want to be loved by our parents, but we also long for their respect and to be accorded the dignity that we think we deserve. What does it mean to respect a person? Respect is showing regard for the worth of someone or something. It takes three main forms.

- ✕ Respect for oneself
- ✕ Respect for others
- ✕ Respect for all forms of life and the environment that sustains them



Showing respect for oneself requires one to treat one's own life — its spiritual and physical dimensions — as having inherent value. That's why it is wrong to engage in self-destructive behavior such as drug or alcohol abuse. In fact, if one doesn't respect and love oneself, it is very hard to respect and love others. This is why Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Respecting others requires that we treat all other human beings — even those whom we dislike — as having dignity and rights equal to our own. That is the heart of the Golden Rule — "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Goethe said that there is no outward sign of true courtesy that does not rest on a deep moral foundation. Respect for property comes from an understanding that property is an extension of a person or a community.

Respect for the whole complex web of life prohibits cruelty to animals and calls us to act with care toward the natural environment, the fragile ecosystem on which all life depends. It includes respect for inanimate things too.

Respect is shown by the way we behave. This is why most parents are concerned with teaching their children how to behave well, how to have good manners, and how to treat people respectfully.

Courtesy and good manners enable people to get along with each other and resolve problems in a way that is

Etiquette in a nutshell

- Never break an engagement when one is made, whether of a business or social nature. If you are compelled to do so, make an immediate apology either by note or in person.
- Be punctual as to time, precise as to payment, honest and thoughtful in all your transactions, whether with rich or poor.
- Never look over the shoulder of one who is reading, or intrude yourself into a conversation in which you are not invited or expected to take part.
- Tell the truth at all times and in all places. It is better to have a reputation for truthfulness than one for wit, wisdom, or brilliancy.
- Avoid making personal comments regarding a person's dress, manners, or habits. Be sure you are all right in these respects, and you will find you have quite enough to attend to.
- Always be thoughtful regarding the comfort and pleasure of others. Give the best seat in your room to a lady, an aged person, or an invalid.
- Ask no questions about the affairs of your friend unless he wants your advice. Then he will tell you all he desires to have you know.
- A true lady or gentleman, one who is worthy of the name, will never disparage one of the other sex by word or deed.
- Always remember that a book that has been loaned to you is not yours to loan to another.
- Mention your wife or husband with the greatest respect, even in your most familiar references.
- If you have calls to make, see that you attend to them punctually. Your friends may reasonably think you slight them when you fail to do so.
- If wine or liquors are used on your table or in your presence, never urge others to use them against their own inclinations.

acceptable and dignified. To the left is an excerpt from a late nineteenth-century book entitled *Correct Manners, A Complete Handbook of Etiquette*. Can you add to the list?

We learn respect in the family, both from the way we are treated by our parents and from the way we see them treating others. Words spoken outside the home are often learned in the home. Our parents teach us to respect things: not to break things or touch things that belong to someone else. They teach us not to hit our siblings and to be polite to visitors. We learn that there is a proper way to behave. If we are rude, we can expect to be reprimanded by our parents and elders. When we show disrespect to another person, we are saying to him, "You are not valuable. Your thoughts and feelings are of little importance. You do not count for much." For the same reason, when someone is rude to us, we feel offended.

Respect, then, depends on the recognition that we are part of a common human heritage and are all worthy of the same regard. Each person has a unique value and should never be treated as a means to achieve some end. Despite the different backgrounds,

languages or family traditions we may have, we must respect each other, even when we do not like or agree with the other person. We should strive to treat other people the way we would like to be treated.

Tolerance

If we feel very deeply about something, it may be difficult to respect a person who thinks differently. We believe that we are right and that our way is the only right way. In this case we may regard a person as an enemy, not because he has done anything to us personally but just because his truth is not the same as ours. Even more, we may believe that his truth is false and dangerous. This is why religious people have fought and even killed each other. On both sides of such conflicts, one could find sincere and moral people who nevertheless could not tolerate each other. However, in many countries a tradition of religious tolerance has developed and people are no longer discriminated against or punished for what they believe. Society is much richer when we tolerate people's eccentricities and differing opinions. Still, there are limits to tolerance. We should not tolerate injustice, evil, corruption, lies, or bad behavior. These are all expressions of a lack of respect.

There is a Christian saying that one must "love the sinner but hate the sin." If a person does something wrong, he or she should be corrected and punished if necessary. But at the same time the person should be treated with respect. Even a criminal has a right to the basic respect due to him as a human being, even if he is to be punished for his crimes.

Empathy

One of the ways that we can develop and deepen our respect for other people is through empathy. When we empathize with a person, we feel the way he feels and think the way he thinks. We don't necessarily sympathize or agree with him, but we try to understand him, to see the world through his eyes. It is easy to judge and criticize other people without understanding them. But there is a wise American Indian saying: "Do not judge another person until you have walked a mile in his moccasins."

Learning to empathize is not easy, especially if we don't also sympathize with a person. It is a valuable and important skill but one that is not easily acquired. Here are some questions a person may ask himself in order to more closely understand another person's situation. (This applies to all situations, including trying to understand a friend or a parent when in a disagreement.)

One going to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts.

— African proverb

- ✗ How does this person feel?
- ✗ How would I feel if I were that person?
- ✗ How would I want other people to act if I were that person?

Empathy leads to understanding and compassion. When we seek to understand and appreciate differences, we can avoid destructive conflict and disunity.

If all people desire respect, then what does respecting others involve? To answer that question we can ask, "How do I want to be treated?"

- ✗ I want to be treated as valuable in myself, not simply to be used by other people.
- ✗ I want to be treated with care, not violence.
- ✗ I want to be accepted as an individual, not as just a member of a certain group or category of persons.

Something to think about



What is it about human differences that can bring new insights, new discoveries, new experiences and higher understanding?

In 1959 John Howard Griffin, a white American journalist, deeply concerned with the mistreatment of black Americans, took medication that temporarily turned his skin dark brown. He did this in order to pose as a black man and submerge himself in the black American community. He thought that the only way he could understand the dynamics of the racial struggle objectively was by living in "both worlds." He wrote about his experiences in a bestselling book, *Black Like Me*, which was published in 1960. The following is a short excerpt from the book:

In the bus station lobby, I looked for signs indicating a colored waiting room, but saw none. I walked up to the ticket counter. When the lady ticket-seller saw me, her otherwise attractive face turned sour, violently so. This look was so unexpected and so unprovoked I was taken aback.

"What do you want?" she snapped. Taking care to pitch my voice to politeness, I asked about the next bus to Hattiesburg. She answered rudely and glared at me with such loathing I knew I was receiving what was called the "hate stare." It was my first experience with it. It is far more than the look of disapproval one occasionally gets. This was so exaggeratedly hateful I would have been amused if I was not so surprised. I framed the words in my mind:

“Pardon me, but have I done something to offend you?” But I realized that I had done nothing — my color offended her. “I’ll take a one-way ticket to Hattiesburg, please,” I said and placed a ten dollar bill on the counter.

“I can’t change that big a bill,” she said abruptly and turned away, as though the matter were closed. I remained at the window, feeling strangely abandoned but not knowing what else to do. In a while she flew back at me, her face flushed, and nearly shouted:

“I told you — I can’t change that big a bill.”

“Surely,” I said stiffly, “in the entire system there must be some means of changing a ten dollar bill. Perhaps the manager ... ”

She jerked the bill furiously from my hand and stepped away from the window. In a moment she reappeared to hurl my change at the counter with such force most of it fell on the floor at my feet. I was truly dumbfounded by this deep fury that possessed her whenever she looked at me. Her performance was so venomous, I felt sorry for her. It must have shown in my expression, for her face congested a high pink. She undoubtedly considered it a supreme insolence for a Negro to dare to feel sorry for her. I was the same man, whether white or black. Yet when I was white, I received the brotherly love, smiles and privileges from whites and the hate stares or obsequiousness from the Negroes. And when I was a Negro, the whites judged me fit for the junk heap, while the Negroes treated me with great warmth.

This story illustrates that empathy is related to respecting others as individuals. The journalist was able to empathize with the Negroes, while the white ticket-seller could not. The problem was that she was not treating him as an individual but as a “black man.” It was the stereotype that she had of black people that made her treat him so badly. We all have stereotypes and prejudices that prevent us from even starting to know other people as individuals. Let us take a look at this problem.



Generalizations

The first time we meet someone from a particular school, town, or country is important. The impression we have of that person (and he of us) will probably lead to the formation of a general picture of what such people are like. This is why it is so important to behave sensitively when you go abroad yourself. When people meet you, whether you like it or not, they meet you as a representative of your country and judge it accordingly. If we have a bad experience with a person from a particular country, we will probably assume that everyone is like him. Later, however, when we meet others from his country, we may discover that the first person was not a good representative, and we will modify our general picture accordingly. This is the way that we form pictures of what people of certain groups are like.

It is not possible to examine everything and everybody in the world individually. We naturally make generalizations, which serve as rough guides as to what to expect from particular things or people. This helps us to make decisions more quickly. For example, the generalization that bulls are dangerous may not apply to every individual bull. However, when in the same field as a bull it is wiser to be cautious than to test the validity of the generalization for oneself — unless, of course, one aspires to become a bullfighter. Of course, for anyone to make good decisions, his generalizations should be as accurate as possible.

It is interesting to see how such generalizations develop and change. Forty years ago, cars manufactured in Japan were made from recycled steel and were often of poor quality. As a result, they had a poor reputation. Sensible people took this into consideration when deciding whether or not to buy a Japanese car. However, as the years went by, the quality of Japanese goods improved until today they have a very good reputation for quality and price. The importance of reputation is the reason that many businesses spend a lot of money on building up and maintaining a “brand image” based on quality.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes of people work in a similar way. Many people have a set of assumptions and expectations about what people of the opposite sex are like, or what people of a particular race or nationality are like. Whenever they meet such a person, they



have a certain image of what to expect in terms of behavior. If these expectations are correct, it helps a person to respond and relate to the person successfully. It also means that one will not be surprised by any idiosyncrasies. This is very wise. If a certain group of people develop the reputation for being dishonest, then one is less likely to be deceived by them. In the same way, one would be more likely to unreservedly trust a person who is a member of a group with the reputation for honesty. Such knowledge, if it is accurate, is very valuable. Businessmen, diplomats, and tourists usually spend some time studying the national character of a new country they are going to visit so they will know what to expect. A person who traveled around the world expecting everyone to be honest would be very naive, and a person who expected everyone to be dishonest would miss many chances of making wonderful friends.

The problem is that often these generalizations become stereotypes — oversimplified and rigid images which are often distorted and exaggerated. There is usually a grain of truth — but only a grain — in them, because otherwise they wouldn't have developed. Stereotypes rob a person of the ability to function fully in the world because they provide only a very distorted view of reality. Dependence on stereotypes is the result of intellectual laziness. A person who cannot be bothered to learn the facts for himself just adopts the secondhand opinions of other people without checking them.

Stereotypes can sometimes be favorable (“All Englishmen are gentlemen”), sometimes amusing (“Scotsmen have deep pockets and short arms”), but can also be malicious (“Jews are liars”). They may be deliberately distorted due to a sense of racial or national superiority or simply because of ignorance. They often arise out of a fear of the unknown and a dislike of what is different. One group, to prove to itself its own superiority and to justify its dislike of another group, may create stereotypes that portray the other group as being subhuman. In such cases, people refuse to acknowledge evidence that doesn't fit into the stereotype they have of a particular group. People who refuse to conform to the stereotype may be hated even more than those who do.

Prejudice

Such stereotypes can lead to prejudice — a judgment or an opinion that is made before the facts are known. Because of prejudice, a person is judged guilty not because of the facts of his situation but because of who he is. This attitude has time and again resulted in the inhumane treatment of people. We already looked at how anti-Semitism led to the Holocaust, but there have been many other similar tragedies: the extermination of the *kulaks* in Ukraine in the 1930s, the slave trade, the treatment by the British of the Aborigines in Australia and Tasmania, and the recent tribal slaughter in Burundi and Rwanda.

Stereotypes are usually passed on in the family from parents to children. They may have no rational basis but are charged with emotion. They are also often transmitted through the media and inflated by politicians trying to curry favor by attacking an unpopular minority. Stereotypes also are spread through racial and ethnic jokes and slurs. Persons who engage in such verbal abuse tell themselves that what they are saying is all right because there is no one from that group present to hear or be hurt by it. But in speaking in this way, and by listening to and laughing at such jokes, a poisonous atmosphere of disrespect and intolerance toward members of a certain group is created and spread.

As long as you keep a person down,
some part of you has to be down
there to hold him down, so it means
you cannot soar as you otherwise
might.

— Marian Anderson
African-American singer

Since stereotypes are a distorted view of reality, they are harmful both to the person who holds them (since he cannot make informed decisions) and to the person or group that they are about (since they may be subject to abuse). It behooves every person to examine the opinions and prejudices inherited from his or her parents and society and determine how accurate they are. We should be constantly on guard against absorbing new stereotypes about new groups of people.

Something to think about



- How do you think the author of *Black Like Me* felt, being treated so differently as a black man and a white man?
- Do you think he still had the same thoughts, values and desires, even though he had changed the color of his skin?
- What does this excerpt say about the way some people judge others?
- What stereotypes and prejudices do you have?

For Your Journal



- Why should we respect all people and not just those we feel are “deserving” of our respect?
- Think about a group of people about whom you hold negative beliefs and feelings. List those beliefs and feelings, and indicate which are facts and which are opinions. Then try to remember where you learned all of these things. Are your beliefs based in truth? Where did your ideas about this group come from? Are these ideas that you want to pass on to others? Why or why not? No single person or group of people is completely evil. What good points do you see in this group of people?

The Prophet

by Mikhail Lermontov

Since the eternal Judge gave me a prophet's omniscience,
I have been reading the pages of evil and vice in people's hearts.

I began to proclaim the pure teachings of love and truth,
but my neighbors threw stones at me.

I poured ashes on my head and fled from the cities;
now I live in the desert like the birds, on God's food.

Keeping God's commandment, all the creatures obey me there, and
stars listen to me, sparkling in the sky.

But when I am hurrying through a noisy city,
old men say to the children, smiling contemptuously:

"Look, there is an example for you! He was too proud to live with us.
He tried to persuade us that God was speaking through him.

Look at him, children, how dull, thin and pale he is,
how poor he is and how everybody despises him!"

CHAPTER 34

Me and My Shadow

How often have you found yourself struggling to do what is right? One part of you knows what you should do, while another part wants to do something else. Whenever we should do something good, dozens of reasons appear not to do it. It even seems easier to be bad than to be good. How can this internal struggle be resolved? Since we all face such questions, let us examine this issue more deeply.



Good mind, evil mind

Our true desire is to do good, because this is how we experience true happiness. This desire comes from our good mind, which directs our thoughts, words and actions to benefit others. When we act upon this desire, though we may have some discomfort at first, we experience lasting satisfaction and happiness. For example, suppose you have borrowed a lot of money from a good friend. It may not be easy to pay it back, but if you do, in the long run a more trusting and loving friendship will develop.

However, from inside comes another desire that pushes us to do something ignoble and wrong. You may be tempted to cheat your friend and not pay back the money. This selfish desire says, "Oh, he has a lot of money and doesn't need the money, but I do." You think that if you avoid your friend for a long time, he will never ask for the money and you won't have to repay him! So, for a whole year you avoid your friend. He never asks for the money back, and one part of you thinks, "Oh, I was so clever." But the reality is, you also feel guilty about what you have done. You know you have done wrong and your self-respect is damaged. Because of selfishness and stupidity, you have betrayed and perhaps even lost a friend. You feel a sense of regret: "Why did I do something so short-sighted?" Temporary satisfaction is replaced by lasting sorrow. This evil desire, to use others for our own benefit, comes from our evil mind.

Each of us has both good desires and base desires. Although we all want to be a good person, to fulfill our duties and obligations, and to help others, we also have selfish desires. Although we know these desires are wrong, they are still very powerful. Where do these desires come from?

It's all in the mind

The books and magazines we read, the television and films we watch, the music we enjoy and the people with whom we associate — all these have an influence on us through the thoughts they stimulate. Sometimes our mind seems a bit like a radio receiver, "tuning in" to many different channels. We can think about our friends and

enemies, hum tunes, dream about what we wish we were doing, imagine all kinds of impossible situations, carry out imaginary conversations, make plans for the future or relive the past. In fact, it takes concentration to stop one's mind from wandering.

Every image makes an impression, and each affects us differently. Haven't you ever read a book with a noble and righteous hero, felt drawn to that character and thought, "I would like to be like that"? Haven't you sung songs that stirred your emotions and inspired you? When our minds are filled with good images, we tend to have good desires. We want to be good and noble and righteous. We are inspired to

help others. These good desires lead us to do good actions, and when we do something good we feel happy. There is no greater joy than to make another person happy. We enjoy helping and serving others, and we also want to create beauty and be surrounded by beautiful things.

As we follow our good desires, we develop good habits, such as being honest and trustworthy. As these good habits become more and more part of our nature, we develop a good character. Finally, our heart becomes good. We no longer are dominated by bad thoughts or desires. We no longer have to struggle to be good. In fact, being and doing good has become our basic nature, and we cannot help expressing goodness, even at the risk of our life. When others hurt us, we no longer feel resentful or seek revenge. Instead, we love people for their own sake and we care about their well-being. We are happy to see other people's happiness and prosperity, even if they were formerly our enemies.

On the other hand, if we allow bad images to fill our mind, we will have bad thoughts. These bad images appeal to and stimulate the baser parts of our personality. There is a part of us that enjoys listening to and thinking about things that are wrong. For example, part of us likes to listen to gossip and rumors. We especially enjoy, in a rather perverse way that we may be ashamed to admit, hearing bad

things about people whom we don't like or whom we regard as rivals in some way. It is this part of our personality on which sensationalist and yellow journalism thrives. Pornography also appeals to our baser desires. Rather than lift the spirit with a vision of unselfish love, it fills the mind with lustful thoughts and desires. Although we know it is wrong, we experience an evil joy from indulging in such thoughts. We imagine doing things we know are wrong, even though we may never intend to carry them out. All these evil thoughts and desires, though, are eventually manifested in some way. With such thoughts, we are beginning to create our own hell. In such a state we cannot love, and, as Fyodor Dostoyevsky said, "Hell is suffering from an inability to love."

Furthermore, evil desires lead to the formation of bad habits, such as being lazy, rude and ill-mannered. As we follow our bad habits, our character is gradually corrupted too. We become dishonest, and may acquire vices. Toward the end of this downward path, our heart becomes evil. We may dwell in resentful thoughts and feelings or derive a perverse joy from destroying beautiful things. We may relive arguments we have had, in which we imagine ourselves hitting or even killing the



other person. An evil smile sometimes is seen on a person's face when he has deliberately hurt someone, and with this kind of character we are secretly and maybe even openly joyful when something bad happens to someone we envy. In the end, such a person may become a murderer.

The great Russian mystic, St. Nilus of Sorsky, showed that whether we win the struggle to control our passions and vices depends on how we react to the various thoughts that enter the mind.

At first, a thought comes to us as a pure appearance. This appearance is neutral and sinless because it does not depend on us. Then we begin to discuss this thought. This may already be sinful if the thought is evil. We must resist the evil suggestion by opposing it with good thoughts. The next stage is consent, when we accept the evil suggestion voluntarily. In one form of consent a person not only willingly accepts evil suggestions but also is ready to perform them, only stopping because he is prevented by circumstances. This is very sinful. The next stage is capture. In this case a person continually thinks of his evil desires and is enslaved by them. He still may return to virtue but not easily. The last stage is passion, when a man willingly and continually surrenders himself to evil suggestions and they become his second nature.

—From *Russian Mystics*, by Sergius Bolshakoff

The inner struggle

Within us, then, are two different, irreconcilable aspects of character. Even the best things we do are often slightly tarnished by some selfish motivation. And yet even the worst person has a conscience that doesn't let him sleep easily at night. To some extent the good and evil aspects of our nature coexist. But if we try to follow the way of goodness, a war erupts within us. Within ourselves we cannot deny that there is a terrible contradiction. St. Paul, one of the greatest Christian evangelists, lamented about his own inner struggle:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do. ... For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing.

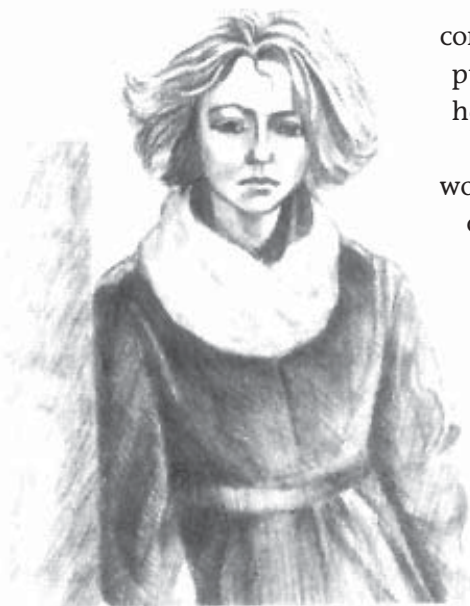
— Romans 7:15-19

This inner conflict destroys us: We seem to be one person, but we have contradictory purposes. We are like a cup with a hole in it, made for a purpose that we cannot fulfill. Likewise, our true nature is to be good and happy, but because of this contradiction, we destroy our own happiness.

The war within each individual mind has led to the conflict in the world. When we are not at peace with ourselves, it is easy to come into conflict with others. Woe to anyone who crosses our path when we are in a bad mood! The conflict between men and women, the conflict between groups, the conflict among nations — all are reflections of the conflict within me. We find conflict in the family because families are made up of contradictory individuals.

What to do about it?

Having a designer wardrobe, enjoying a prestigious and well-paying job, or being admired for our cleverness may satisfy our desires temporarily, but none of these will ever help us to overcome our evil mind and therefore cannot be the source of





deep and lasting happiness in our lives. How many rich, famous, powerful and intelligent people have lived a miserable existence, even to the point of taking their life? We can never satisfy our deep, internal *need* and desire for inner peace and happiness through external means alone. Quite simply, we become miserable when we live a selfish life.

Real and lasting happiness, on any level in the world, is only possible when we eliminate the seeds of conflict within ourselves by becoming loving and caring human beings who are realizing truth, beauty and goodness in our life.

We should try to understand why we act in ways we come to dislike. It's almost certain that if we don't like ourselves when we behave in a certain way, other people probably don't either.

We must strengthen the good side of our nature. To start with, we have to be careful about what we allow into our soul. We have to guard our senses and not absorb anything that disturbs our mind. Instead, we should fill our minds with good images and thoughts. Every time a bad thought enters our consciousness, we should quickly reject it and think about something good instead. This is often a struggle, but it helps change our consciousness when we read uplifting literature, listen to inspiring music, and even sing songs.

It is also helpful to be completely honest about our thoughts, not just with ourselves but also with a close and wise friend whom we can trust. Telling another person about our bad thoughts often makes us see clearly how shameful and foolish they are, and we may feel it is easier to defeat them once they are no longer secrets.

If we do something wrong, we should confess the misdeed and apologize, putting right any harm we have done. If we can empathize with the other person and understand how we have hurt him, it is much easier to apologize sincerely.

We should make an effort to cultivate good habits and do good deeds, helping others in whatever way we can. For example, when we feel tempted to keep a treat for ourselves and secretly eat it alone, we can immediately take a step toward goodness by sharing it with someone else. In this way we can challenge our evil mind and strengthen our good mind. But always, it is necessary to be open and honest about our thoughts. This is the best way to remain humble and open in our heart and with our friends.

Ultimately, our struggle is between selfishness and love. Although we may think that by being selfish we will profit, this is very foolish. When we are selfish, we are in hell. We are so self-conscious that we are paralyzed and cannot freely give or receive love. Yet we are born for love and to live for each other's happiness. Most of us have noticed that when we are more concerned with taking care of others, understanding and serving their needs and caring about what makes them genuinely happy, the qualities of our bright side shine through and we stimulate the beauty and goodness in others as well. You become the self that you like and that others like as well. When you feel good about yourself, it is far easier to feel good about and care for others. You are genuinely happy.

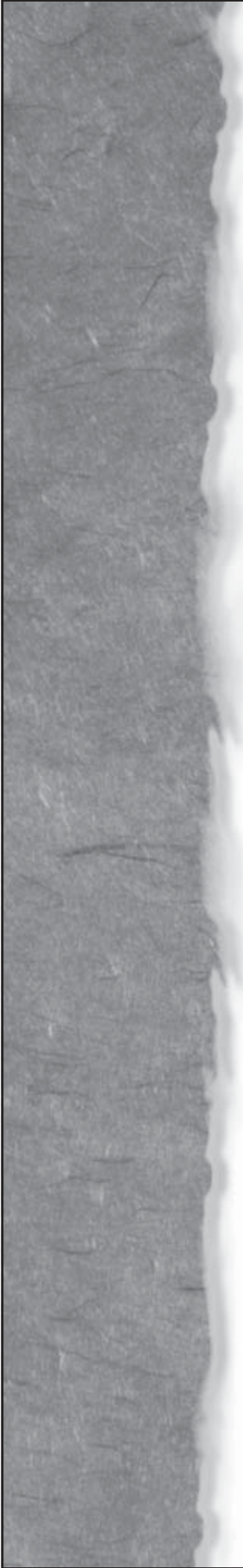
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Much of the story of “The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” came to Robert Louis Stevenson in a dream. It tells of a brilliant and respectable scientist called Dr. Jekyll who discovers a drug that splits his personality. After taking it his appearance is altered. The evil side of his character takes over and he becomes Mr. Hyde. The following are some excerpts from Dr. Jekyll’s testimony.

I was born in the year 18— to a large fortune, inclined by nature to industry, fond of the respect of the wise and good among my fellow—men, and thus, as might have been supposed, with every guarantee of an honorable and distinguished future. And indeed, the worst of my faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition, such as has made the happiness of many, but such as I found it hard to reconcile with my imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public. Hence it came about that I concealed my pleasures; and that when I reached the years of reflection, and began to look around me, and take stock of my progress and position in the world, I stood already committed to a profound duplicity in life. Many a man would have even blazoned such irregularities as I was guilty of; but from the high views that I had set before me, I regarded them and hid them with an almost morbid sense of shame. Though so profound a double—dealer, I was in no sense a hypocrite; both sides of me were in dead earnest; I was no more myself when I laid aside restraint and plunged in shame, than when I labored, in the eye of day, at the furtherance of knowledge or the relief of sorrow and suffering. And it chanced that the direction of my scientific studies, which led wholly towards the mystic and transcendental, reacted and shed a strong light on this consciousness of the perennial war among my members. With every day, and from both sides of my intelligence, the moral and the intellectual, I thus drew steadily near to that truth by whose discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two. I, from the nature of my life, advanced infallibly in one direction only. It was on the moral side, and in my own person, that I learned to recognize the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that two natures that contended in my field of consciousness, even as I was radically both; and from an early date, even before the course of my scientific discoveries had begun to suggest the most naked possibility of such a miracle, I had learned to dwell with pleasure, as a beloved day-dream, on the thought of the separation of these elements.

[Dr. Jekyll discovers a drug that separates the two parts of his nature and he takes a dose.]

The most racking pangs succeeded: a grinding in the bones, deadly nausea, and a horror of the spirit that cannot be exceeded at the hour of birth or death. Then these agonies began swiftly to subside, and I came to myself as if out of a great sickness. There was something strange in my sensations, something incredibly new, and from its novelty, incredibly sweet. I felt younger, lighter, happier in body; within I was conscious of a heady recklessness, a current of disordered sensual images running like a mill race in by fancy, a solution of the bonds of obligation, an unknown



but not an innocent freedom of the soul. I knew myself, at the first breath of this new life, to be more wicked, tenfold more wicked, sold a slave to my original evil; and the thought, in that moment, braced and delighted me like wine. I stretched out my hands, exalting in the freshness of these sensations; and in the act, I was suddenly aware that I had lost stature.

[In a mirror] I saw for the first time the appearance of Edward Hyde. The evil side of my nature, to which I had now transferred the stamping efficacy, was less robust and less developed than the good which I had just deposed. Again, in the course of my life, which had been after all, nine-tenths a life of effort, virtue and control, it had been less exercised and much less exhausted. And hence, as I think, it came about that Edward Hyde was so much smaller, slighter, and younger than Henry Jekyll. Even as good shone upon the countenance of the one, evil was written broadly and plainly on the face of the other. Evil besides (which I still believe to be the lethal side of man) had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay.

That night I had come to the fatal cross-roads. Hence, although I had now two characters as well as two appearances, one was wholly evil, and the other was still the old Henry Jekyll, that incongruous compound of whose reformation and improvement I had already learned to despair.

The pleasures which I made haste to seek in my disguise were, as I have said, undignified; I would scarce use a harder term. But in the hands of Edward Hyde they soon began to turn towards the monstrous. When I would come back from these excursions, I was often plunged into a kind of wonder at my vicarious depravity. This familiar that I called out of my soul, and sent forth alone to do his good pleasure, was a being inherently malign and villainous; his every act and thought centered on self; drinking pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another; relentless like a man of stone. Henry Jekyll stood at times aghast before the acts of Edward Hyde; but the situation was apart from ordinary laws, and insidiously relaxed the grasp of conscience. It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone that was guilty. Jekyll was no worse; he woke again to his good qualities seemingly unimpaired; he would even make haste, where possible, to undo the evil done by Hyde. And thus his conscience slumbered.

[One night he goes to sleep as Dr. Jekyll but wakes up the next morning as Mr. Hyde.]

This inexplicable incident, this reversal of my previous experience, seemed, like the Babylonian finger on the wall, to be spelling out the letters of my judgment; and I began to reflect more seriously than ever before on the issues and possibilities of my double existence. That part of me which I had the power of projecting had lately been much exercised and nourished; it had seemed to me of late as though the body of Edward Hyde had frown in stature, as though (when I wore that form) I were more conscious of a more generous tide of blood; and I began to spy a danger that, if this were much prolonged, the balance of my nature might be permanently overthrown, the power of voluntary change be forever forfeited, and the character of Edward Hyde become irrevocably mine. Whereas in the beginning, the difficulty had been to throw off the body of Jekyll, it had of late gradually but decidedly transferred itself to

the other side. All things therefore seemed to point to this: That I was slowly losing hold of my original and better self, and becoming slowly incorporated with my second and worse.

[Jekyll resolves never to take the potion again.]

For two months, however, I was true to my determination; for two months I led a life of such severity as I had never before attained to, and enjoyed the compensations of an approving conscience. But time began at last to obliterate the freshness of my alarm; the praises of conscience began to grow into a thing of course; I began to be tortured with throes and longings, as Hyde struggled after freedom; and at last, in an hour of moral weakness, I once again compounded and swallowed the transforming draught.

I do not suppose that when a drunkard reasons with himself upon his vice, he is once out of a hundred times affected by the dangers that he runs through his brutish physical insensibility; neither had I, long as I had considered my position, made enough allowance for the complete moral insensibility and insensate readiness to evil which were the leading characters of Edward Hyde. Yet it was by these that I was punished. My devil had long been caged, he came out roaring.

[This time Hyde brutally murders a sensitive old gentleman. Jekyll again determines never to take the potion again.]

I resolved in my future conduct to redeem the past; and I can say with some honesty that my resolve was fruitful of some good. I labored to relieve suffering and the days passed quietly, almost happily for myself. Nor can I say that I wearied of this beneficent and innocent life; I think instead that I daily enjoyed it more completely; but I was still cursed with my duality of purpose; and as the first edge of my penitence wore off, the lower side of me, so long indulged, so recently chained down, began to growl for license. Not that I dreamed of resuscitating Hyde; the bare idea of that would startle me to frenzy: no, it was in my own person that I was once more tempted to trifle with my conscience; and it was as an ordinary secret sinner that I at last fell before the assaults of temptation.

There comes an end to all things; the most capacious measure is filled at last; and this brief condescension to my evil finally destroyed the balance of my soul. And yet I was not alarmed; the fall seemed natural, like a return to the old days before I had made my discovery. I sat in the sun on a bench; the animal within me was licking the chops of memory; the spiritual side a little drowsed, promising subsequent penitence, but not yet moved to begin. After all, I reflected, I was like my neighbors; and then I smiled, comparing myself with other men, comparing my active goodwill with the lazy cruelty of their neglect. And at the moment of that vainglorious thought, a qualm came over me, a horrid nausea and the most deadly shuddering. These passed away, and left me faint; then as in its turn the faintness subsided, I began to be aware of a change in the temper of my thoughts, a greater boldness, a contempt of danger, a solution of the bonds of obligation. I looked down; my clothes hung formlessly on my shrunken limbs; the hand that lay on my knee was corded and hairy. I was once more Edward Hyde.

[From this time on it becomes more and more difficult to return to the character of Dr. Jekyll and in the end he kills himself.]

CHAPTER 35

Freedom and Responsibility

Ask any person if he wants to be free and he will say yes. But what is freedom? How free are we?

Nobody is completely free to do anything that he or she may wish. Freedom is always limited in different ways that are important to consider.

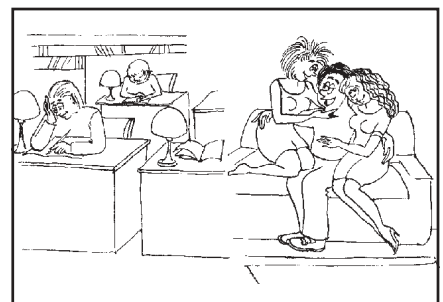
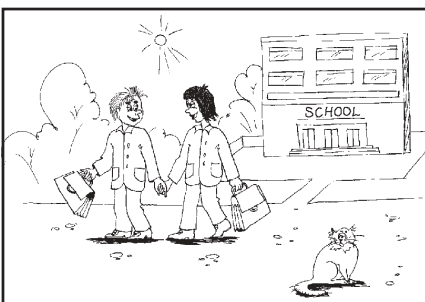
- ✗ I may decide that I would like to launch myself into the air, spread my arms and fly. I may have dreamed of doing so, but my physical body is, and always will be, incapable of unaided flight. To overcome that limitation, I must resort to technology.
- ✗ I may wish to be a famous and highly talented artist, musician or gymnast, but my freedom is again limited. It may not be physically impossible for me to achieve these things, but it requires a sustained investment of training in order to develop natural ability. Therefore, my chances of achieving what I want are limited to the quality of training that I can acquire.
- ✗ I may wish to take all the money in a bank, but I am likely to be arrested.

These are some examples of the way that freedom is limited, whether by physical laws, natural abilities, or legal and social constraints. What do we think of a person who protests against such situations, complaining that his freedom is limited?

Freedom of will

There is an important dimension to freedom that is often forgotten: freedom of will. Although our freedom may be constrained and our choices limited, in the moment when we choose, we experience freedom. We feel that we could have made a different choice. But how free are we, really?

If you decide to do something but then give up, are you free? If you find yourself doing something you really don't want to do, and know you will regret it later but cannot stop yourself, are you free? Do you have the freedom to follow your conscience? Do you ever give in to temptation and do what you know is wrong? Do you



have the freedom to forgive someone, or do you sometimes say, “I cannot forgive that person”? Do you have the freedom to apologize?

Often we sense that there are powerful forces within ourselves pushing us in different directions. Sometimes people say that they are not free, that their behavior is determined by their biological and social makeup. Yet in the moment of making a decision, we mostly feel confident that these choices are ours to make. This confidence is in our sense of being a free agent.

True freedom is closely linked to self-control. Only a self-disciplined person can decide to do something and accomplish it. A person who cannot control his emotions is blown all over the place by impulses, spurious thoughts and desires. For example, is an alcoholic free? In one sense, yes, because no one is forcing him to drink, but in

another sense he is a slave to his insatiable desire for alcohol. How about a person who wants to give up smoking but cannot? If we cannot redirect our desires, our will is not free.

A person who is internally free is naturally creative. He is always growing, creating and developing in every dimension. Freedom of the spirit can never be taken away. Such a free spirit is continually, spontaneously and unconsciously good, giving to others in a creative and life-affirming way.

Viktor Frankl, a survivor of a Nazi concentration camp, wrote in his book *Man's Search for Meaning* in contemplation of the ultimate human freedom:

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken away from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms — to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom — which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstances, renouncing freedom and dignity to become molded into the form of the typical inmate.

True freedom is the freedom to follow one's conscience and maintain one's personal integrity. However, it is often quite a struggle, and it takes a lot of courage to follow one's conscience and be good. True freedom is not license — the freedom to do evil and be selfish. One cannot defend being rude and selfish as an expression of true freedom.

Freedom of action

Besides freedom of will, freedom also includes freedom of action. As social and political freedoms developed, the opportunity for free action was expanded. Often this was due to the efforts of people who wanted the freedom to worship God in their unique way; the freedom to hold beliefs different from those of a powerful majority; the freedom to discover truth; and the freedom of speech and the press so as to discover and disseminate truth. Good people never campaigned for the freedom to lie or mistreat others.

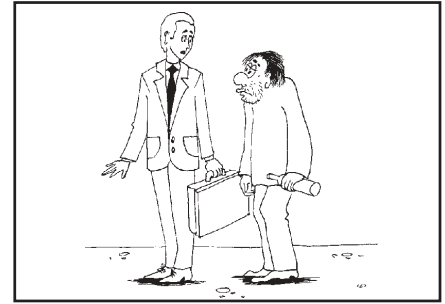
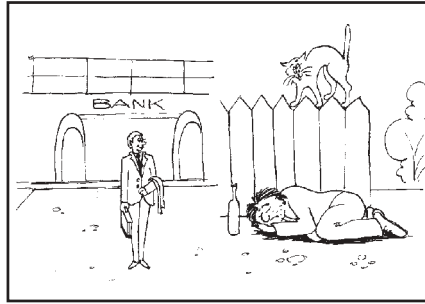
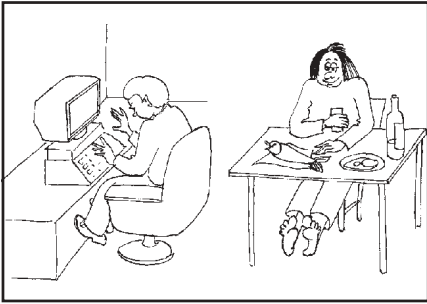
People also wanted the freedom that comes from the rule of law — that is to say,

From the forces that all creatures bind,
who overcomes himself his freedom finds.

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
German writer

Freedom! A fine word when rightly
understood. What freedom would
you have? What is the freedom of the
most free? To act rightly!

— Goethe



There is no spirit without freedom and there is no freedom without spirit. Freedom cannot be received from outside. Free science, free art, free society can be achieved only by free spirit. Souls that are enslaved cannot create anything free.

— Nikolai Berdyaev

they wanted to be able to live, act, and work as they chose, and pursue their dreams within the protective boundaries of the law. Creative people such as artists, writers and poets wanted to be free from the arbitrary coercion of others. Finally, people campaigned for the freedom to own property.

Freedom of will and freedom of action should go hand in hand. However, when there is freedom but people do not follow their conscience, the result is crime, social collapse and anarchy. If we have freedom but no purpose in life, we may experience psychological disintegration. A free society in which people have few morals soon collapses, and even that freedom is lost as order is reimposed on society. Thus there cannot be a genuinely free society that is not at the same time a moral society, a society made up of mature, responsible people and institutions. Edmund Burke, an 18th century British philosopher, showed clearly the link between internal and external freedom.

Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites; in proportion as their love of justice is above their rapacity; in proportion as their soundness and sobriety of understanding is above their vanity and presumption; in proportion as they are more disposed to listen to the counsels of the wise and good, in preference to the flattery of knaves. Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.

Freedom and responsibility

People who avoid taking responsibility for their lives, avoiding clear moral commitments and choices, often pave the way for someone else to control their lives. Thus, their freedom actually diminishes. Of course, if we surrender our responsibility to someone else, we cannot complain that we are no longer free.

The Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw once wrote, “Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.” People like freedom because it gives them a sense of mastery over things and people. They dislike responsibility because it constrains them from satisfying their desires. Thus an immature person wants to take the credit for anything that goes well, but finds someone else to blame if something goes wrong. A mature person by contrast takes responsibility even for those things that are not his fault, and shares any credit with others.

Everyone wants to be free, but there are times when we are terrified by the decisions confronting us. We feel relieved (or at least part of us does) when someone else makes the choice or, better still, when “fate” steps in and decides for us. We try to



escape from freedom. Then if something goes wrong, we can blame someone else. When we do this, however, we are acting like puppets.

Freedom cannot be separated from responsibility. When we are young, we have little freedom, and thus little responsibility. As we become more responsible, we gain more freedom and can take more and more of the decisions that affect our lives. We want the freedom to be responsible, the freedom to make mistakes and to learn from them. If a person interferes in our responsibility, we feel violated, because it is our freedom that makes us human. This freedom, though, means not only that we have the opportunity and burden of making choices, but also that we must bear the consequences of our actions and receive praise or blame for them.

If you make a mistake or do something wrong and others treat you with pity, you will probably feel uncomfortable. This is because each of us wants to be respected and treated as a moral person responsible for his own actions. It would even be better to be punished for our sin than to be forgiven because we cannot be held responsible for it. To hold people responsible for their actions is to treat them as moral agents.

If an action is made under duress or circumstances of extreme coercion, then our culpability for its result is less. If someone physically forces us

to commit a crime, we are not held responsible for it. We may still feel bad about committing it, but we are not blamed or punished by others. In any case, we can only be held responsible for our own actions. To be responsible for everything is to be responsible for nothing.

We are answerable not just for the things we do but also for the kind of person we become. Every thought, word and deed in our lives is recorded in our character. We create our own character by the decisions we make. If we react well in a particular situation, it sets a good pattern for future responses; and correspondingly, if we react badly, we will begin a pattern that is hard to break. Thus you have the ability to decide your own destiny in terms of the quality of character you develop.

Freedom and law

We have seen how freedom can be limited by laws. Many people think that since human beings are free, they should not be restricted by any laws or norms. However, if everyone could do whatever he pleased without law and order, the inevitable result would be that the strongest would rule and the weakest would be destroyed. Freedom itself only exists under the rule of law, laws that apply in the same way to everyone, regardless of who they are.

True freedom exists in willingly observing laws. Freedom that ignores laws and tries to avoid responsibility for the consequences of one's actions is license and brings nothing but destruction. Freedom exists only within a framework of rules. Imagine playing a game of chess. Are you free to move the chessmen however you wish? Is a game with no rules more fun and sophisticated than one with many rules? Rules help

to make other people more predictable. They prevent any arbitrary moves by either player. And finally, it's the rules that create this or that game.

How about society? If there are rules against stealing or murder that apply to everyone, everyone can feel safe. Without such rules, no one is safe, and no one has the freedom to walk the streets without fear. So the purpose of laws is to protect people from criminals.



A train, as long as it remains on its tracks, can run rapidly or move slowly, go forward or move backward. In other words, the train has freedom only insofar as it remains on the tracks. If it is derailed, it will be damaged and may also cause damage to people and property.

Hence, man's conscience and moral law restrict his freedom, but they are working to protect him from going in a self-destructive and evil way. They do not restrict or disturb him in the development of goodness. Actually, man's conscience, moral laws, and society's laws exist in order to achieve the unity, order, harmony, freedom and happiness of the total society.

True freedom, therefore, always brings results that are good and true. We want the freedom to love and to use our creativity to make ourselves and others happy. With love, the things that laws require seem natural. True love inspires a sacrificial attitude in a person. When you love someone, it is natural to think, "I will ignore my own needs in order to make that person happy."

Only by following
the way of love and goodness
can we become truly free

Something to
think about



- Have you ever made a decision that was entirely your own? Describe it.
- Is freedom necessary to live a good life in a good society?
- How free are you? What are the chief restraints on your freedom?
- What is the difference between freedom and anarchy?
- Are there any freedoms that you are willing to die for? If so, what are they?
- At what point do people become responsible for their actions?

For Your
Journal



Imagine that you are unjustly accused of a serious crime and put into prison. You have no one to talk to and your freedom is restricted to your cell. How could you make yourself free within the space of your own mind? Do you think it is possible to do so without becoming crazy?

It Is Difficult to be God

by A. Strugatsky and B. Strugatsky

"Do you really consider this world perfect?" Rumata asked in surprise.

"But certainly, my young friend! I don't like many things in the world, I would prefer many things to be different, but what can I do? In the eyes of the Supreme Power, perfection looks otherwise than it does to me. Of what use is it for a tree to complain that it cannot move, although it may have been glad to run from a woodcutter's ax?"

"And what if one's ultimate destination could be changed?"

"No one but the Supreme Power is capable of that. ... "

"But imagine you are God. ... "

Budach laughed.

"If I could imagine myself God, I would have done it!"

"And if you had the chance to advise God?"

"You have a rich imagination," said Budach with relish. "It is good. Are you literate? Marvelous! I would gladly give you some lessons. ... "

"You are flattering me. ... But still, what would you advise God? What do you think he should do in order for you to say: Now the world is good?"

Smiling approvingly, Budach settled back in his armchair and folded his hands on his stomach.

"Well," he said, "it would be this. I would say to the Almighty: 'Creator, I don't know your plans; maybe you don't want people to be good and happy. Then, do want it! It is so easy to achieve. Give people enough bread, meat and wine; give them shelter and clothes. Let hunger and need perish, and everything separating people, too.' "

"Is that all?" Rumata asked.

"Do you think it is insufficient?"

Rumata shook his head. "God would answer: 'This wouldn't help people because the powerful of your world will rob the weak of what I have given them, and the weak will remain poor.' "

"I would ask him to protect the weak. 'Make cruel rulers listen to reason,' I would say."

"Cruelty is power. Having lost cruelty, the rulers will lose power and other cruel people will come to replace them."

Budach stopped smiling.

"Punish the cruel," he said firmly, "so that the powerful wouldn't be cruel to the weak."

"Man is born weak. He gains power when there is no one around him stronger than he. When cruel rulers are punished, their place will be taken by the strongest from among the weak. They will be cruel, too. Eventually everybody will have to be punished and I don't want that."

"You know better, Almighty. Then make it so that the people get everything and don't need to take things away from one another."



"This will be of no use either," Rumata sighed, "for God would say 'when they get everything gratis, without having to work, from my hands, they will forget work, lose the taste of life and turn into domestic beasts whom I will have to feed and dress forever.'"

"Don't give them everything at once!" Budach said hotly. "Give gradually, little by little!"

"Gradually people will take everything they need themselves." Budach laughed uneasily.

"Now I see it is not so simple," he said, "I've never thought of such things. ... We seem to have tried everything. Oh, no," he leant forward, "there is one more chance. Make people love work and knowledge most of all so that work and knowledge became the only things in their lives!"

"God could do it," Rumata said, "but is it worthwhile depriving mankind of its history? Should this mankind be replaced by a different one? Won't it be the same as wiping this mankind from the Earth and making another in its place?"

Budach thought silently, frowning. Rumata waited. Outside there was the wistful squeak of the carts again. Budach said quietly,

"Then, Lord, wipe us from the Earth and make us anew, more perfect ... or better, leave us to go our own way."

"God's heart is full of pity," Rumata said, "He could not do that."

The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor

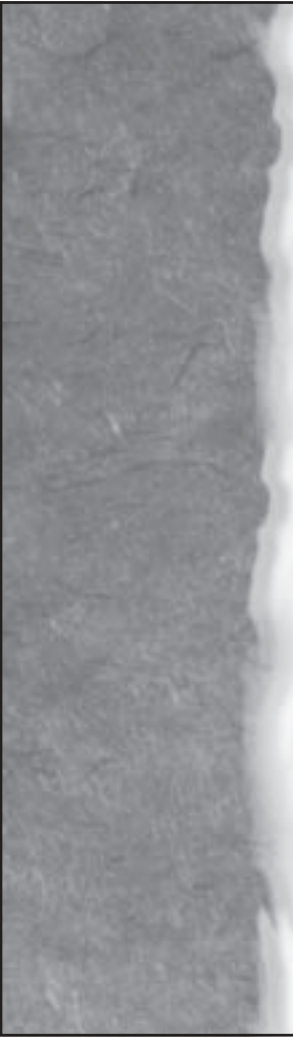
From The Brothers Karamazov,
by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

The action takes place in Spain, in Seville, during the most terrible time of the Inquisition, when fires were lighted every day throughout the land to the glory of God... (In the crowd Jesus) appeared quietly, inconspicuously, but everyone – and that is why it is so strange – recognizes him. The people are drawn to him by an irresistible force, they surround him, they throng about him, they follow him. He walks among them in silence with a gentle smile of infinite compassion. (He raises a little girl to life on the steps of the cathedral)...At that very moment the Cardinal himself, the Grand Inquisitor, passes by the cathedral in the square. He sees everything... and his face darkens. (He has Jesus arrested)... and so great is his power and so accustomed are the people to obey him, so humble and submissive are they to his will, that the crowd immediately makes way for the guards and, amid the death-like hush that descends upon the square they lay hands upon Jesus and lead him away...

(In the night the Grand Inquisitor pays a visit to Jesus in prison.)
“Why did you come to meddle with us? For you have come to meddle with us, and you know it. But tomorrow I shall condemn you and burn you at the stake as the vilest of heretics... You rejected the only way by which men might be made happy. You preached freedom which men in their simplicity and their innate lawlessness cannot even comprehend, which they fear and dread – for nothing has ever been more unendurable to man and to human society than freedom!

But in the end they will become obedient. They will marvel at us and they will regard us as gods because, having become their masters, we consented to endure freedom and rule over them – so dreadful will freedom become to them in the end. Man, so long as he remains free, has no more constant and agonizing anxiety than to find as quickly as possible someone to worship. But man seeks to worship only what is incontestable, so incontestable indeed that all men at once agree to worship in together. For the chief concern of these miserable creatures is not only to find something that I or someone else can worship, but to find something that all believe in and worship, and the absolutely essential thing is that they should do so all together. I tell you, man has no more agonizing anxiety than to find someone to whom he can hand over with all speed the gift of freedom with which the unhappy creature is born.

Instead of taking possession of men's freedom you multiplied it and burdened the spiritual kingdom of man with its sufferings for ever. But



did it never occur to you that he would at last reject and call in question even your image and your truth, if he were weighed down by so fearful a burden as freedom of choice? But here too your judgment of men was too high, for they are slaves, though rebels by nature. I swear, man has been created a weaker and baser creature than you thought him to be.

We have corrected your great work and have based it on miracle, mystery, and authority. And men rejoiced that they were once more led like sheep and the terrible gift which had brought them so much suffering had at last been lifted from their hearts.

With us, however, all will be happy and will no longer rise in rebellion nor exterminate one another, as they do everywhere under your freedom. Oh, we will convince them that only then will they become free when they have resigned their freedom to us and have submitted to us. And what do you think? Shall we be right or shall we be lying? They will themselves be convinced that we are right, for they will remember the horrors of slavery and confusion to which your freedom brought them. Freedom, a free mind and science, will lead them into such a jungle and bring them face to face with such marvels and insoluble mysteries that some of them, the recalcitrant and the fierce, will destroy themselves, others, recalcitrant but weak, will destroy one another, and the rest, weak and unhappy, will come crawling to your feet and cry aloud, "Yes, you were right, you alone possessed his mystery, and we come back to you – save us from ourselves!"

Something to
think about



- Can you refute the following claims made in this passage?
 - Human freedom leads to conflict and destruction
 - Obedience and loss of freedom brings true happiness
- Do human beings have a need to worship?
- Do human beings have the capacity to use their freedom correctly?
- What is the 'correct' use of freedom?
- What do you think of the view of human nature put forth in this passage?

CHAPTER 36

Conscience

Kostya needed money badly. That's why for a moment he was tempted to steal the cassette player he saw standing on the table in the teacher's room. The wind had blown the door half open, and Kostya could see that the teacher was not inside. It would be very easy to put the cassette player in his bag and then quickly leave the school. The chances of his being caught were minimal, and Kostya wouldn't have to worry about his debts any longer. And yet, a voice in his mind told Kostya not to do it. Kostya knew that this voice was his conscience. Why can't I just steal this cassette player, he thought as he kept walking down the corridor. Why is my conscience making life more difficult for me? I know many other people who would have stolen the recorder without hesitation. Why am I different? Where does a conscience come from anyway?

What is conscience?

Conscience is the inner sense that enables us to distinguish between right and wrong. It is innately sensitive to the truth, points us toward the greater good and urges us to live for the benefit of others. It is the inner voice that guides us, on the basis of our general moral views, to make correct decisions in concrete situations.

Only conscience can bring together the "eternal," universal moral law and the concrete situation of a concrete person.

— Viktor Frankl

We often talk of conscience as a "force." When we follow our conscience, doing what is right and not doing what is wrong, this force becomes strong. When we are tempted to do something we know is wrong, conscience usually stops us. This is why we talk about not being able to go against our conscience.

However, once we do violate it, all its moral energy is released and becomes guilt. The stronger your conscience, the greater the feeling of guilt when you violate it. However, once you violate your conscience, it becomes much weaker because all the "force" has been dissipated. So even though you know what you are doing is wrong, your conscience puts up a weaker and weaker battle each time, and each time you violate it, you feel less guilty.

Guilt, then, is often a healthy indicator of an active conscience. If we do something we know is wrong, it is a sign of psychological health to feel guilty. If you put your hand in the fire, you feel pain. The pain tells you to take your hand out of the fire, put it under cold water and not put it in a flame again. Although we don't like to feel pain, it would be very dangerous not to be able to feel it. Guilt is the pain the conscience and soul feel when we do something wrong. In the same way, a person who has no sense of guilt is very dangerous. Conscience is our teacher. It tells us how

I feel nothing

Can bring us peace in the midst of the worries of this world;

Nothing, nothing ... perhaps only conscience!

When being healthy, it will dwell

Over hatred and evil slander;

But if it gets spoiled

With just one dirty spot,

Then you are in trouble: your soul

Will get burned as if from deadly sickness,

Your heart will be filled with poison,

Reproof will hammer in your ears,

And bloody boys* in your eyes ...

You would like to run away, but there is no place to hide ...

That's the misery of the one whose conscience is not pure!

— Alexander Pushkin, from *Boris Godunov*

*Pushkin is referring to the haunting vision of a king who killed his own son

Morality is rooted in religion. The internal light that helps man to distinguish between good and evil comes from the Source of Light. It is within one's conscience, conscience so miraculously free from natural human egoism, that a person feels Someone watching together with him all his actions, fulfilling His judgment, and constantly together with him.

— Sergei Bulgakov
The Unceasing Light

to avoid guilt. Guilt, too, is our friend because it warns us that we are going in the wrong direction.

Each of us at some time or other has experienced the pangs of conscience. What is conscience, and where does it come from? Already the fact that everyone has a conscience proves that it is universal.

All of us know of the existence of natural laws. We are also aware of laws that govern human society. Conscience is like an unwritten law that exists in our soul. It is interesting that normally we rely much more on this internal moral law than on government statutes. One can never trace all crimes, and laws are sometimes misused against innocent people by unrighteous judges. That is why normal relationships are only possible when people have an active conscience.

In understanding the relationship between conscience and the other parts of our character, i.e., intellect, emotion and will, we see that conscience seems to stand above them.

For example, the intellect can decide whether a certain action is clever or stupid, useful and profitable or not. But something besides logical analysis influences our intellect, imposing a moral point of view and thus pushing us to choose the way that is right, even if it may be unpleasant or unprofitable. In this way, conscience sits in judgment on the intellect.

In a similar manner, volition can determine one's ability to desire something and to invest effort in fulfilling that desire. This ability can be directed to the fulfillment of an evil design, too. There are many examples of criminals who have a very strong will. So again, we see that conscience plays a role in guiding and redirecting human will.

The same can be said also about emotions. All of us want to experience pleasant emotions and avoid unpleasant ones. But if one's behavior contradicts one's sincerely held values and beliefs, the conscience will warn or punish one with negative feelings. Here, too, it is conscience that guides emotions, and not vice versa.

Even though conscience is a dimension of our character, is it also in some sense a force that is independent of us?

Conscience as a criterion of good and evil

Some people think that all moral problems would be solved if people just followed their conscience. However, because the conscience is influenced by the environment, each person's

conscience will be different from everyone else's. For example, our values are heavily influenced by our cultural background. Thus, because of the dietary requirements of their faiths, it is against the conscience of Jews and Muslims to eat pork, but they happily eat beef that has been appropriately prepared. On the other hand, to Hindus, cows are sacred animals. They cannot in good conscience harm one, let alone eat one. For Jains, members of another Indian religion, all life is so sacred that they will not even disturb the roots of the vegetables they eat because they do not want to cause unnecessary harm to the plant. Unlike these religious traditions, Christianity has few dietary restrictions and believers eat any type of food without qualms of conscience.



The other point that needs to be remembered when choosing conscience as an appropriate judge of good and evil is that its formation doesn't happen automatically. To a substantial degree, we ourselves determine what kind of conscience we have.

Often during discussions about morality people wonder whether they should always follow their conscience. It is difficult to give a simple answer to this question. First, we should never go against our conscience. This means that we should never do something we know is wrong. However, sometimes when we say, "I'm just following my conscience," we really mean, "It's OK to do this because I don't feel guilty about it." For example, someone may not feel it is wrong to cheat and copy another student's work in class. In other words, he may be merely justifying doing what he already wanted to do and is not really making a proper moral judgment. So, the second part of the answer is that we have to consider whether or not our conscience has developed in the proper manner. The problem of merely following one's conscience is that it may be malformed or undernourished, providing weak signals and insufficient guidance for moral judgment.

Why cannot the conscience provide an absolute standard of good and evil? We have already discussed that each person has both good and evil within himself. That is why sometimes we are influenced by our egoistic self, our own "Mr. Hyde." This can influence our conscience, causing it to remain silent in situations when it should stop us from doing wrong. The conscience can "get lost" if it has not been properly formed by moral principles. These universal principles do exist, and they are shared by all people by virtue of our common humanity. One example is the Golden Rule that we have already discussed. It's worth noticing that it was discovered independently by people of different cultures and different epochs. If we form our conscience based on principles like this, then it will become our reliable guide in all of life's complicated situations.

Distorted conscience

No one's conscience is perfect. However, sometimes a conscience can be badly formed. When this happens, the character and sense of guilt are also distorted. Four ways in which the conscience can be distorted are:

Wrongly formed conscience

Through no fault of their own, people are sometimes given information about right and wrong that is mistaken. Sometimes things that are judged to be right at a certain time in history are later understood to be clearly wrong. For example, at one time many people thought that slavery (owning other people as property) was morally justified. They did not have a bad conscience about owning slaves because of the culture in which they grew up. Now, however, slavery is recognized to be grossly immoral. Since none of us has a conscience that is completely undistorted, we should

check whether our conscience is well formed. One way we can improve our conscience is through studying moral literature generally accepted to have universal wisdom.

Unwarranted guilt

Sometimes we feel guilty when we should not, and we think something is wrong when it is not wrong. A person who opposed slavery might have felt “bad” because he was going against what his parents and society told him was right and natural. There is a lot of pressure involved in going against what one has been told is right if one later comes to recognize it is wrong. Part of this pressure is experienced as unwarranted guilt.

Nobody likes to think that what he is doing is wrong, so we are tempted to change our conscience to justify ourselves. We tell ourselves that something we do cannot be wrong because it is natural and everyone is doing it. If someone questions us about our actions or suggests that what we are doing is wrong, we become upset, self-defensive, angry and aggressive.

Lax conscience

This occurs when the conscience becomes less and less sensitive to right and wrong and we experience too little guilt. The following story gives an illustration:

Vladimir entered the crowded store and walked directly to the little candy display in the corner. As usual, dozens of people were swarming around the area, busily looking at the products and getting in line to pay. He remembers the first time he did this. He was so nervous, his pulse raced and his hands sweated. After he stole that first candy bar, he felt terrible. He thought about it for a long time. “What if everybody else did it?” he thought. But then, only a week later he found himself in the same store stealing again. That time it wasn’t so bad, and besides, the woman who owned the stand was always in a foul mood. Maybe if she were nicer he’d

feel worse, he thought. Now, three of his friends were waiting outside. When Vladimir told his friends about stealing the candy, one of them was upset, saying it’s wrong to take anything that’s not yours. But another friend thought Vladimir must be brave, and even dared Vladimir to steal four candy bars at one time. Now it was just a challenge. Vladimir knew he could do it, and he was glad he didn’t feel bad about it anymore.

Legalistic conscience

Sometimes we get so caught up in obeying the rules that we cannot see the real needs of a situation, the whole picture, or the right order of priorities. For example, if we are in a hurry to be at an appointment and then see someone who needs our help, what should we do? Is it more important to not be late for an appointment or to help someone? It is easy to become so paralyzed by convention that we cannot follow what our heart tells us to do.



Forming our conscience

As we now know from our discussion of human nature, our soul naturally seeks beauty, truth and goodness. This is why we are often restless. We want to move on, be more creative, learn more, be better, and find a higher standard of goodness. We are never satisfied to remain the way we are. Although an inner sense of right and wrong is part of our nature as human beings, conscience is formed or shaped by many internal and external sources over a lifetime.

The family is the primary source for our understanding of what is right and wrong. It is from the words and, even more, the example of our parents that we learn how to behave, what it means to be human, how to be a man or a woman, a father or a mother. Indeed, the moral education of children is perhaps the single most important task of parenting. Parents who have a habit of communicating directly with each other about important issues pass on to their children a sense of honesty. On the other hand, a family in which a parent lies to hide a problem, for example alcoholism, may implicitly teach the children that lying is usually better than honesty.

Other important influences are our relatives, friends, teachers, community, the media and the books we read. Our souls sift through and digest all of this, and in this way this our conscience is formed. Thus, our standard of conscience is formed by the interaction of our soul and the environment.

The next question is: Do we need a conscience? Some people find the conscience an inconvenience because it either stops them from satiating immediate desires or makes them feel guilty afterward.

The conscience should act like a compass, telling us which way to go, or at least which way not to go! If the dial of a compass is not accurate, we can easily be misled. So it is with our conscience. That is why it is important for us to spend time forming our conscience so that it is clear and straight. If we don't, we will not be able to clearly distinguish between right and wrong.

Often a situation arises in which we are confused about what is the right thing to do. This is why we often make mistakes and do things we later regret. Conscience, then, is our teacher and our true friend. It always tells us what we need to hear rather than what we want to hear. Heeding the conscience usually leads to a feeling of inner peace, a sense of integrity and of being true to oneself. Deep inside we feel good about our decision, and the happiness we experience is the result of right living.

What we take in through our senses affects us for better or worse. If we have good parents and teachers and mix with good people, we are likely to be influenced by their values to be good ourselves. If, however, we associate with people who are dishonest and corrupt, we are likely to adopt their values as our own. Some people bring out the best in us, while others bring out the worst. In the same way, some



types of literature and films appeal to and develop the good part of our soul, while others stimulate our bad side. This is why we should be discriminating about what we read and see.

We can develop, sharpen and strengthen our conscience by studying spiritually and morally uplifting literature. Our mind naturally wants truth, and when we read something that contains moral or spiritual truth, our soul recognizes it and the ideas sink into our soul and educate it. This is also why we sometimes don't like to read or listen to things that are true because we feel "judged." Even though we try to deny our conscience and escape from feeling guilty, when we are confronted with the truth, our soul automatically responds.

Guidelines for following our conscience

It's not the greatness of power, or money, or physical strength, or delicious food, or luxurious clothes or other human advantages that bring us joy and peace of mind; it can be only the result of spiritual well-being and pure conscience.

— St. John Chrysostom
early Christian mystic

Thus there are two aspects to conscience — knowing what is right and doing what is right. Who decides whether or not you do what is right? *You* do! You have to make decisions, and no one else is responsible and accountable for your decisions. You cannot blindly follow the ideas of anyone else. So you have to carefully and sincerely form your own conscience.

Unfortunately, it is often easier to know what is right than to do what is right. How can we see clearly through complex situations? Granted, sometimes we will make mistakes, and at other times we may intentionally do things that we know are wrong. The development of conscience takes time, contemplation and effort.

CHAPTER 37

Honesty

What is honesty?

Honesty means many things and affects one's life in many different ways. Honesty expresses both self-respect and respect for others. Dishonesty fully respects neither oneself nor others. Honesty imbues lives with openness, reliability, and candor; it represents a disposition to live in the light. Dishonesty seeks shade, cover, or concealment. It is a disposition to live partly in the dark.

Honesty is seeking to tell yourself and others the truth, even if it is sometimes difficult. Honesty is more than simply not lying; it is a sincere devotion to truthfulness. An honest person seeks the truth with an open mind and tries to clearly communicate the truth. Honesty begins within oneself, is part of one's personal relationships, and finally colors and directs everything that one does. Honest people are trustworthy. They can be relied upon to be who they claim to be, to mean what they say, and to keep their word. The level of honesty one lives with influences everything in one's life, from the smallest of human relationships to one's self-image. Honesty is a personal virtue possessed by many of the great people in history, and is sought by

those who are working toward the highest realization of themselves. Why, then, is it so hard to be honest? Why would anyone want to be dishonest?

Honesty in society

In a world in which dishonesty seems almost commonplace and often is expected as part of "getting ahead," why should a person be honest? Isn't it naive or foolish? Don't people take advantage of an honest person? Like all other virtues, the seeking and upholding of truth enables a person to live a more fully human life.

We live in a world that is so complicated that nobody understands it fully. To function within it we depend on the knowledge and information we gather from many different sources. With accurate information we can make informed decisions. If the information we have is of poor quality, then we have a distorted view of the world and our decisions will not lead to the results we desire. For example, if we want to travel somewhere by train but don't have an up-to-date timetable, or if the trains don't follow the timetable





anyway, we will waste a lot of time. This is why correct information is of vital importance to everyone. Since the information we have comes to us from others, we depend upon their being honest. We have to trust them. We cannot possibly check every piece of information for ourselves. That is why we want people to be trustworthy. We depend on and need the best insights of others, those from the past and the present, to help us understand our world more clearly.

Businesses need good information to develop new products and marketing strategies. Governments, as much as individuals, depend on accurate information so as to develop sensible and appropriate policies. A poorly informed government can lead its country into disastrous crises. A society based on deception and lies cannot function well. If we cannot trust the people around us to tell us the truth, we become paralyzed by the fear that what looks real is only a sham.

The truth isn't always easy to hear. Leaders often surround themselves with people who will tell them what they want to hear and not what they ought to hear. That is why it is important for all of us to learn to evaluate other people's opinions and learn whom we can really trust to tell us the truth. Every social activity, every human enterprise requiring people to act in concert, is impeded when people aren't honest with one another.

Honesty with ourselves

Honest people tend to be honest first of all with themselves. They are skilled at listening to what is really going on inside them — what they are thinking and feeling and why they behave in the way that they do. They recognize what their deeper motivations are. There is little contradiction between what they think, what they feel, and what they say or do. They have a sense of personal integrity and wholeness. They have a clear conscience and high self-esteem.

Sometimes we are ashamed or afraid of our thoughts and feelings. We avoid looking honestly within because to do so would be too painful. It might also mean having to change, and that is painful too. So we pretend to ourselves that everything is okay and that if there are problems, we are not to blame. It is tempting to fill our time with distractions so as never to have to listen to ourselves.

Part of the reason is our immaturity. Often we do or feel things that bring us shame, and we seek to conceal this weak part of our nature. We think that if people saw the whole picture of the truth about us, they would be so shocked that they might reject us. For most people, revealing their true selves is very threatening. We often feel pressured to live up to a certain image. To keep other people's love and respect, we tell a lie or a partial truth. This tendency only makes the situation worse. We now "know" that we do not deserve the love or respect that we are receiving and so cannot accept it. Inside we become empty, and the relationships become strained and no longer free and enriching.

Another way in which we are often dishonest with ourselves is in justifying our actions. If we do something we know is wrong, we often come up with all sorts of reasons why it is not really wrong at all. We think up justifications for our actions so that we can pretend to ourselves that what we are doing is good, or at least not so bad. For example:

- ✗ “It doesn’t matter if I use the change from the food shopping on a new cassette. My mother wouldn’t care if I did, and she’ll never notice.”
- ✗ “I can stay out later than my parents said. I’ll just tell them that the buses were running irregularly and we were stuck in traffic. They always believe me, and anyway, I’m not doing anything wrong.”
- ✗ “I can tell Marina about Larissa’s problem. We’re all friends and it wouldn’t hurt Larissa. Anyhow, Larissa probably already told her herself.”

Rationalizing allows us to do or say something that contradicts our core beliefs, because we are temporarily freed from the accompanying guilt. When we do this, we don’t necessarily hurt other people, but we hurt ourselves because we lose our sense of personal integrity. We know deep down that we are being true neither to ourselves nor to others.

Honesty, then, enables us to live in the real world. Dishonesty, on the other hand, tends to place confusion around everything we do. When people are dishonest with us, we receive a distorted view of reality. We make decisions that are unrealistic. A person who is not living honestly may be deceiving not only others but also himself. Deception of all types creates confusion. After one lives in the realm of deception for a period of time, his world is no longer the world of reality in which honest people live, but is largely the world as he pretends it to be.

One day after school I was with a group of friends. They all began to talk about another friend from our group. At first it was funny to hear what they were saying. Harmless, I thought, but then something struck me — “What if they were talking about me?” I thought I would feel terrible and I would never trust any of them. Then I wondered, “Maybe they do talk about me when I’m not there.”

— a 16-year-old high-school student

Honesty in personal relationships

By generating trust, honesty forms a basis for wholesome relationships at the personal level as well as the societal level — friendships, marriages, parent-child relationships, and other close bonds.

Gossip, rumor, and slander are sources of hurt known by many high-school students. Such talk can ruin a person’s reputation, destroy friendships and simultaneously devastate a person’s self-esteem. Gossip creates an atmosphere of distrust and insecurity besides causing pain to the person it targets.

All of us understand that gossip and lies are the quickest ways to destroy any close relationship. But sometimes it is just as harmful to a relationship when one side simply hides something from the other.

One high-school student’s mother always asked her where she was going when she went out with her friends on

Saturday nights. Finding that her daughter had lied about her whereabouts on several occasions, the mother was shocked and hurt. She asked her daughter, “How would you feel if I lied to you about where I was going every time I left the house?”

“But that’s different!” protested the daughter.

“Why?” the mother replied. “I am a human being too.”

It is important to be aware of the possible repercussions of even small lies. When we tell a lie, sometimes we think it is a way out of a difficult situation. However, there is a saying that “a liar must have a perfect memory,” because one lie leads to others, which must be told to cover up the previous lie. Almost always a person gets caught and is trapped in his web of lies. Even if the deception goes undiscovered, the person will still have to live with anxiety, guilt and fear. Admitting that we do not know



everything and that we can make mistakes is an important part of developing a healthy character.

In our personal relationships honesty is a virtue to be contemplated. Have you ever really thought about the level of truthfulness and trust between you and the people to whom you are closest? Do you feel that your friends and family are basically honest with you? Do you care? If you discovered that someone you love had told you a lie, how would you feel?

In summary, we can say that honesty does the following:

- ✕ It enables people to live in the real world.
- ✕ It keeps human society functioning.
- ✕ It forms a basis for personal relationships.
- ✕ It gives people an inner sense of freedom.
- ✕ It rewards people with a feeling of integrity.

Sometimes in life we face situations that challenge us profoundly. Sometimes it takes a lot of courage to keep our honesty. But a person of integrity refuses to live a lie, whatever the circumstances. He cannot tell a lie or pretend that something is not the way he knows it to be. He refuses to pretend, much less to deny what he knows to be true. He loves the truth and values his personal integrity even at the cost of his life. He cannot but speak out against tyranny and injustice. He refuses to participate in lies and pretenses. In a society based on falsehood and deception, such a person will not be popular, because he is not afraid to say, in the words of the fairy tale, “The emperor has no clothes.”

In the not so distant past, there were dissidents in the Soviet Union and other communist countries who took a similar stance. Their refusal to live by lies brought them into confrontation with the authorities. They realized that they had a choice. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn put it, “Either truth or falsehood: Toward spiritual independence, or toward spiritual servitude.”

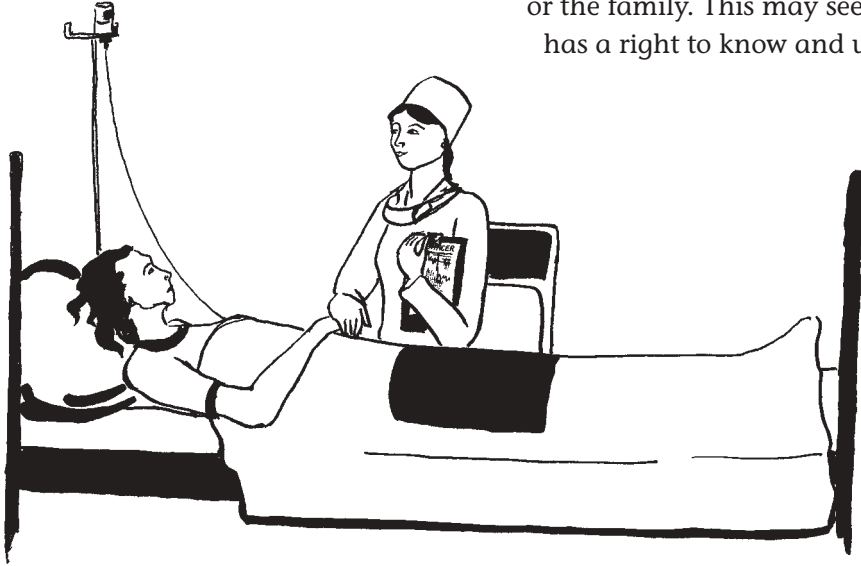
Total honesty?

We naturally come to the next important question about honesty: Must we always be honest and tell the truth? Basically, yes. Since honesty is about reality, everyone is entitled to know the truth. It is a fundamental sign of respect to tell a person the truth and not to deceive him.

This does not mean that we have to tell the whole truth at all times. Honesty is one virtue among many and should not itself become an absolute dictum. It has to be kept in balance with other qualities such as politeness, loyalty, privacy, sensitivity and patience. Just because one thinks that another person is a fool doesn’t mean one should say so for the sake of “honesty.” That would be just rude. There are simple norms of good behavior that “being honest” does not entitle one to violate. If you are in a bad mood, that doesn’t mean you have the right to “honestly” express how you feel to everyone you meet. Furthermore, it is quite normal for a parent or teacher to

encourage a child by telling him that a picture he has drawn is “very good,” although from a strictly aesthetic point of view it is not. Things can be left unsaid or only partly said and still be truthful. An irritating visitor can be told, “My mother is busy now. Can she call you later?” instead of “My mother says you stay too long. She doesn’t want to see you.”

Consider whether it is better to withhold certain medical information from a person who is dying in order to avoid frightening or worrying him or the family. This may seem to be a good reason, but the person has a right to know and usually wants to know what is really



happening. This does not mean one should say, “You are dying and probably won’t live for more than another few months!” It is possible to give such information in a way that allows the patient to decide how much he wants to know. A dying woman may be told, “Your condition is very serious, and I am worried about you.” This allows the patient in her own time to ask for further information and allows the doctor to elaborate in a way that is appropriate.

There are other cases in which we have no obligation at all to tell the truth. In fact, we have the duty to withhold information entirely from someone who has no right to it. For example, suppose you know where a person is hiding from a gang of criminals. Are you obliged to tell the truth and reveal his whereabouts? Clearly not. Honesty is not a cover for cowardice or collaboration. Love says that we should risk our own lives for the sake of others. During the Second World War many heroic Dutch and French citizens hid Jews in their homes to prevent them from being taken away by Nazi officials and sent to concentration camps. When questioned, they did not reveal the whereabouts of the Jews. In the same way, a soldier who has been captured by the enemy is not expected to reveal military secrets in the name of honesty. A person who, worse still, willingly reveals his nation’s secrets to an enemy is not “being honest.” He is a traitor.

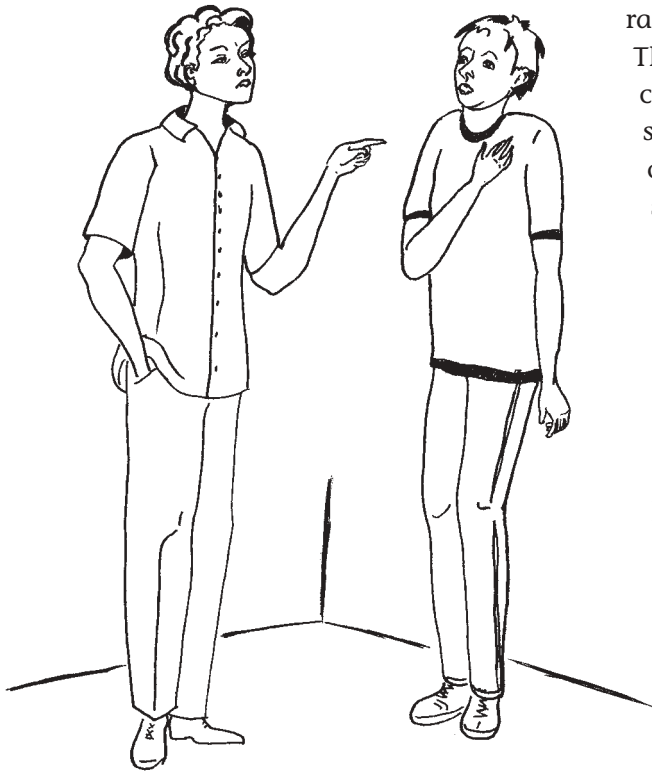
Honesty is not an absolute value. Being honest does not mean that you will always tell the complete truth in every situation. In fact, honesty may depend upon many other variables, and it takes a mature person to know how and when to totally disclose the truth.

Honesty and sensitivity

True honesty is an expression of love and therefore shows respect for the person as well as the relationship. It allows disclosure and prevents secrets and barriers that might hinder the growth of heart. Honesty that is not an expression of love is less than authentic.

A young wife very much in love with her husband wanted to cook him a special meal. She was a wonderful person, but totally unskilled in cooking. Her mother gave her one of her favorite recipes for a meat dish. After working on the meal all day, the young wife served it to her husband. She

asked him if he liked it, and although he hated it and felt as if he could barely swallow it, he responded, “Yes, dear, it’s fantastic!” He knew she had worked hard to please him, and he didn’t want to hurt her feelings. Believing that he really enjoyed the meal, she made it several times a week, and because there were only two of them they always had leftovers. One evening, when they were having an argument (and after many meals of that horrible dish), he finally told his wife that he hated it, could never eat it again, and thought she was the worst cook in the world. Terribly hurt and shocked, she said, “You lied to me! I’ll never trust you again!” Such a small thing, but the seed of deceit was planted.



Although the husband had not been “honest” at first, the sole intent of his “total honesty” was to hurt his wife rather than to communicate his feelings out of love. Their relationship was not open and feelings were not communicated freely. In the course of their relationship the husband had built up a lot of anger about other aspects of their marriage. The meal was not the source of his anger but brought out something much deeper that had led him to frustration.

How could this situation have been avoided? After having been served the meal the first time, the husband might have commented: “Dear, I see how hard you worked to make this meal for me and I really appreciate all that you have done. I could never make a decent supper for myself, but I do not particularly like this dish.” Even though the wife might have been a little disappointed, she would have been grateful later on, knowing that their relationship was based on honesty. Now she could be certain that he truly liked her cooking when he complimented her on it.

To say what you think in any given moment without consideration of the person receiving the word gives rise to a kind of raw and brutal honesty. Often the commitment to this singular virtue blinds the speaker to his deeper motivation, which might be one of malice, not love. Expressions of brutal honesty are likely to be insensitive at best and hurtful at worst. Before anything is said, one should carefully think about the best manner to convey the truth about the situation, in order for the words to meet with greater receptivity.

Let’s look at a few examples of brutal honesty in comparison to sensitive honesty. Notice that both types of honesty get the same point across, just in very different ways. Try to imagine being on the receiving end. Which expression would you prefer to hear?

Brutal Honesty

“You have such a big mouth in the chemistry class. You shouldn’t speak every time the teacher asks a question. Don’t you know that other people know the answers too?”

“Laura doesn’t want you to know about her family situation because she doesn’t trust you and is afraid you’ll tell all the others about her.”

“Your speech was terrible. You’ll never be a success as a public speaker.”

“My mother hates you coming over to our house. She says you’re rude and insensitive.”

Sensitive Honesty

“I think that you are very good at chemistry, but it would be nice to let other students answer the teacher’s questions sometimes.”

“I think Laura doesn’t want to tell you about her family situation because she is afraid you may say something about it to someone else and it’s a very sensitive matter.”

“I think that was a difficult topic to speak about, and I have some ideas on how you could do your next presentation. Don’t feel bad. Public speaking takes a lot of practice.”

“Next time you come over, do you think you could greet my mother nicely and talk to her for a few minutes? It would really make a difference to her.”

As you can see, it is possible to be both honest and sensitive, and fulfill the ideal that “kindness and truth shall meet.” Honesty is not an excuse for being unkind. Occasionally we must say things that another person does not want to hear. Kindness does not mean keeping our mouth shut in these instances. Rather, it means caring enough about ourselves, the other person, and the integrity of the relationship to express the truth in a respectful way. Speaking the truth does not mean blurting out everything that is on our mind. Discretion, sensitivity, and proper timing are needed.

In fact, when you can be both honest and sensitive, the people to whom you are relating will be able to accept what you are saying much more easily. Just knowing someone very well (such as your mother, father, sister, brother or best friend) does not give you license to be cruel. Friendship requires its own artistry in relating well to others. You may help others to see important things that have been ignored, but the way in which you do this means everything. If you can be sensitive, your friends will probably genuinely appreciate your honesty.

Questions & Answers:

What does honesty have to do with my personal relationships?

Honesty is the foundation upon which a good relationship can grow. Without honesty, any relationship will be full of suspicion and insecurity. Once trust is built between people, they feel freer to express themselves and to be honest in return. Small lies are often the beginning of the deterioration of relationships. Once a person has lied to you or deceived you in some way (such as withholding information), there will always be a shadow of doubt in the back of your mind about that person’s sincerity.

What does it mean to be honest with yourself?

Honesty starts with the individual. The ability to understand your own feelings and thoughts is the beginning of being able to understand and be true to others. Being honest with yourself also means staying in touch with your true motives.

Why would anyone strive to be honest?

Sometimes it's much easier to lie, or to cover up the truth so others won't find out about your mistakes or shortcomings. However, when you are honest you don't have to worry about covering up your lies, as one lie easily leads to another lie. You will know that your friends like you the way you are. You don't have to make up stories or hide things to impress them.

How does it feel to be lied to?

Once you discover that your friend has lied to you, even though you don't say anything to her, you will wonder constantly what else she may have lied to you about. There is an invisible wall that appears between the two of you built of distrust.

How does it feel to lie to other people?

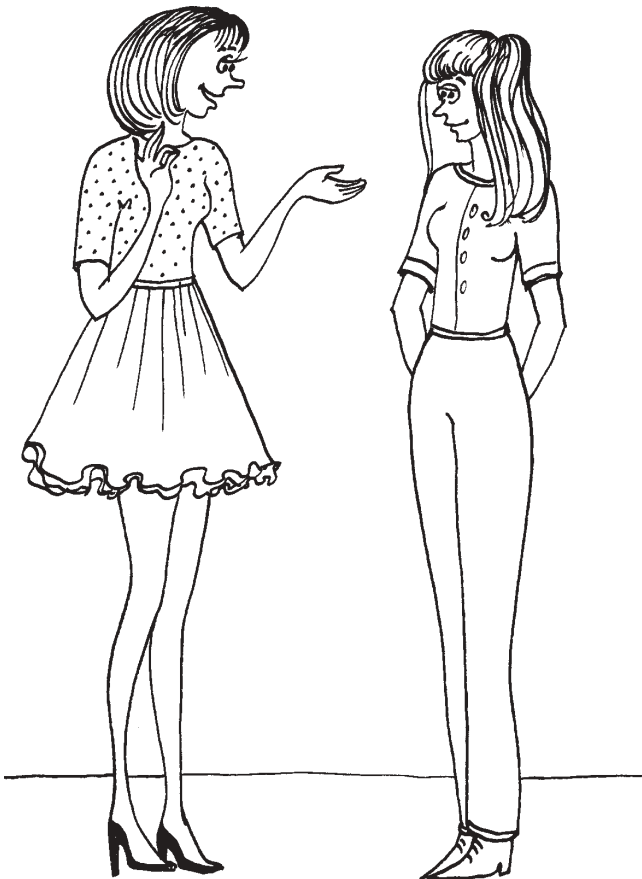
When you lie, feelings of guilt arise from your soul. However, once you start lying to someone, it becomes difficult to stop as lies beget more lies. Once you tell one, you have to tell the more just to cover up that one. So lying becomes a habit. Also, you begin to have a hard time remembering just what you have told someone. Eventually, you will be exposed as it becomes clear that all your stories don't mesh with each other.

What is a "white lie"?

A white lie is a small untruth that doesn't seem to hurt anyone. White lies may seem to make things run more smoothly. Because they seem to help more than hurt, white lies often seem acceptable.

Examples of white lies:

- ✗ "Yes, I love your new sweater!" (You really think it is ugly.)
- ✗ "Don't worry, I didn't tell anyone." (You told only one of your other friends.)
- ✗ "Tell him I'm not home right now." (You just don't want to talk to the person.)



What is the problem with white lies?

Like other lies, white lies ultimately destroy trust. They *are not* harmless. Although white lies may seem unimportant to the person telling them, the person being deceived may feel degraded, manipulated and foolish if he finds out the truth. It may be easier to be dishonest sometimes, but in reality white lies cheapen communication. Harmless and seemingly insignificant lies pave the way for bigger and more serious lies.

What is self-deception?

Self-deception is making oneself believe something that is not true. Usually this type of lying involves lying to others as well. Usually the self-deceiving person is clouding reality to help himself feel less guilty. This commonly takes place through rationalizations.

For example:

- ✗ I won't tell my husband how much I spent on the dress I bought. It would only make him more upset. Besides, I make enough money to afford one nice dress a year.

- ✗ I have so much schoolwork to turn in today. I know I will fail the test if I don't pretend I am sick. I will tell my mother I am sick. In any case, I really don't feel all that well.
- ✗ When my boss asks for the receipt, I will tell him that they didn't give me one. If he finds out I lost it, he'll be very angry. Besides, they usually don't give me sales receipts.
- ✗ Angela asked me to read her story and tell her what I thought. The story was boring, but I know she'll get a good grade on it, so I'll just tell her I thought it was good. Anyway, I could tell she put a lot of time into it.

In each of these situations can you find ways in which the person is not being honest with himself or herself? What is the truth that the person does not admit?

For Your Journal



Write down something you have told yourself in the past that you now recognize was a rationalization. Explain why you felt the need to fool yourself in this way.

The Emperor's New Clothes

by Hans Christian Andersen

Many years ago there was an Emperor who was so excessively fond of new clothes that he spent all his money on them. Life was very lively in the great town where he lived; hosts of strangers came to visit it every day, and among them one day were two swindlers. They (told everyone they were) weavers, and said that they knew how to weave the most beautiful stuffs imaginable. Not only were the colors and patterns unusually fine, but the clothes...had the peculiar quality of becoming invisible to every person who was not fit for the office he held, or if he was impossibly stupid.

"Those must be splendid clothes," thought the Emperor. "By wearing them I shall be able to discover which men in my kingdom are unfitted for their posts. I shall distinguish the wise men from the fools."

He paid the two swindlers a lot of money in advance so that they might begin their work at once. "I should like to know how those weavers are getting on with the stuff," thought the Emperor; but he felt a little uneasy when he reflected that anyone who was stupid or unfit for his post would not be able to see it.

"I will send my faithful old minister to the weavers," thought the Emperor. "He will be best to see how the stuff looks, for he is a clever man and no one fulfills his duties better than he does!"

So the good old minister went into the room where the two swindlers sat working at the empty loom. "Heaven preserve us!" thought the old minister, opening his eyes very wide. "Why I can't see a thing!" But he took care not to say so.

Both the swindlers begged him to be good enough to step a little nearer, and asked if he did not think it a good pattern and beautiful coloring. "Oh, it is beautiful! Quite charming!" said the old minister. "I will certainly tell the Emperor that the stuff pleases me very much."

The Emperor soon sent another faithful official to see how the stuff was getting on, and if it would soon be ready. The same thing happened to him as to the minister; he looked and looked, but as there was only the empty loom, he could see nothing at all.

"I know I am not a fool!" thought the man, "so it must be that I am unfit for my good post! However, one must not let it appear!"

"It is absolutely charming!" he said to the Emperor.

Now the Emperor thought he would like to see it while it was still on the loom. So, accompanied by a number of selected courtiers...he went to visit the crafty impostors.

"What!" thought the Emperor; "I see nothing at all! This is terrible! Am I a fool? Am I not fit to be Emperor? Why, nothing worse could happen to me!"

"Oh, it is beautiful!" said the Emperor. The whole suite gazed and gazed, but saw nothing more than all the others. However, they all

exclaimed with his Majesty, "It is very beautiful!" and they advised him to wear a suit made of this wonderful cloth on the occasion of a great procession which was just about to take place. "It is magnificent! Gorgeous! Excellent!"

At last (the swindlers) said: "Now the Emperor's new clothes are ready!" The Emperor, with his grandest courtiers, went to them himself, and both the swindlers raised one arm in the air, as if they were holding something, and said: "See, these are the trousers, this is the coat, here is the robe!" and so on.

"Yes!" said all the courtiers, but they could not see anything, for there was nothing to see. "Will your imperial majesty be graciously pleased to take off your clothes," said the imposters, "so that we may put on the new ones."

The Emperor took off all his clothes, and the imposters pretended to give one article of dress after the other. "How well his majesty looks in the new clothes!" cried all the people round. "They are the most gorgeous robes!"

"The canopy is waiting outside to be carried over your majesty in the procession," said the master of ceremonies. "Well, I am quite ready," said the Emperor. "Don't the clothes fit well?"

Then the Emperor walked along in the procession under the gorgeous canopy, and everybody in the streets and at the windows exclaimed, "How beautiful the Emperor's new clothes are! And they fit to perfection!" Nobody would let it appear that he could see nothing, for then he would not be fit for his post, or else he was a fool.

"But he has nothing on," said a little child.

"Oh, listen to the innocent," said its father; and one person whispered to the other what the child had said. "He has nothing on; a child says he has nothing on!"

"But he has nothing on!" at last cried all the people.

The Emperor squirmed, for he knew it was true.

CHAPTER 38

Personal Influence

A real-life account: "Someone help, please!"

Waiting at a bus stop in a large city, a young woman stood with a modest bag over her left shoulder. The night air was warm, and the sky was dark with almost no trace of the stars. Only the streetlights and the neon signs of the shops lining the road lit the area. Cars raced past on the street in front of the young woman. People of all shapes and sizes passed as she waited. The city night was full of sights and sounds and the murmur of voices.

After watching dozens of people come and go past the stop, out of the corner of her eye she observed three young men approaching. Although the street was full of commotion, she noticed this trio immediately. She could see them whispering to each other and glancing around suspiciously. She clutched her bag more tightly and looked away from the men, who were now walking toward her. As they began to pass, one man stopped as if to ask her a question. Nervously, she looked into his eyes, preparing to respond. To her shock and terror, one of the other men suddenly lunged at her while the third man grabbed her arms and began to yank her bag from her shoulder.

In a panic, she began to scream. "Help! Help me, somebody! Please!" She was sure that someone would come to her assistance if they saw the situation. Still

there was no reply, but a small crowd had gathered to watch the struggle between the men and the woman. "Get off me!" she cried as she fought with all her strength to keep her bag. "Get off me! Get off me!" she pleaded. The men were now tearing off her necklace and her earrings. In a few moments, a bus pulled up in front of the growing crowd. A few people pushed their way out of the crowd and climbed the stairs to the bus, as did the three men, now carrying the young woman's bag and jewelry. Filled with helpless



rage, the woman watched the thieves ride away on the bus. They laughed and waved goodbye to her through the window as the bus pulled out of sight. The young woman, bursting with anger, stood alone at the bus stop. The crowd that had witnessed her humiliation dispersed, and the curious passers-by continued on their way.

What is it about this story that angers us? Why would anyone allow such a malicious assault to continue when they clearly could have helped the defenseless young woman? Her attackers had no weapons and could have been overpowered easily if those watching had tried to help. Why do such incidents occur so often? Can you imagine watching this scene? Can you imagine intervening?

Read the following situations and answer the accompanying questions:

You are on the escalator of a crowded metro station. You see a man in front of you taking the wallet out of a woman's bag. The woman does not notice the theft, and neither does anyone else (except you!).

- ✗ How would you feel if you were the one being robbed?
- ✗ Would you want anyone to intervene if you were the victim?

You are riding on a bus when you hear a young man making fun of two young, dark-skinned girls on the bus. He is with a friend, and the two are making mean jokes and racial slurs about the girls. The man tells them how he hates "their people." The girls sit quietly with their eyes cast on the floor.

- ✗ Imagine you were one of the girls. What feelings do you think you would have if someone were treating you badly because you were different?
- ✗ Do you think you would be grateful if someone stood up for you and told the young men that what they were saying was wrong?
- ✗ If someone said something in your defense, do you think you would remember that person's action for a long time, or would you easily forget it? Would it encourage or empower you to do the same?

You are with a big group of young people after school. Two boys in your group have a very difficult time getting along. They are always arguing and saying nasty things to each other. You see that today they are especially hostile to each other. You are shocked, however, when the two begin to punch each other and one of the boys pulls out a knife. He viciously stabs the other boy in the shoulder twice and then in his upper arm, and runs away. You and the rest of the young people are standing there in shock. The boy is lying on the ground bleeding profusely, but no one runs for help.

- ✗ Imagine you were the boy who had been stabbed. What would you want your friends to do?
- ✗ How would you feel if you were the boy and all of your friends only stood around and watched you bleed?

It is not easy to become involved in difficult situations and stand up for what you believe. Why should a person risk his life for the sake of another, especially someone he does not even know personally? Courage and compassion are two of the main qualities of a righteous person. Although it may be hard to imagine, hundreds of "ordinary" men and women have given their lives to stand up for what they believed.

In the course of human history there have lived billions of people. Some of them left such a significant trace that, even centuries after their deaths, they are remem-

bered by millions, while nothing is known about the lives of others. What made the difference between such memorable lives and those of other people? Who are those whom humanity remembers with gratitude? Why do some people leave a mark on history? How can the efforts of only one person change anything?

We started our discussion using some concrete examples of situations in which people (and you could well find yourself in their place) faced situations of moral choice. It's obvious that the role they played in those situations was directly dependent on decisions they made. The influence we have on the lives of others can be positive or negative. It can affect only ourselves, embrace our family and a few friends, or have an impact on the destiny of our country or even all of humanity. Let us try to discover what makes the difference.

Moral duty

Most of us would like to influence the lives of others in a beneficial way. We would like to be remembered with gratitude and not with a curse, to have our lives inspire others and not cause more despair. We would like to leave some memories in the hearts of people. How can we do that?

Those who affect the world around them have one feature in common: They are not indifferent. They are ready to get involved in complicated situations so as to help others. Why would someone act in a situation in which it is not required by duty?

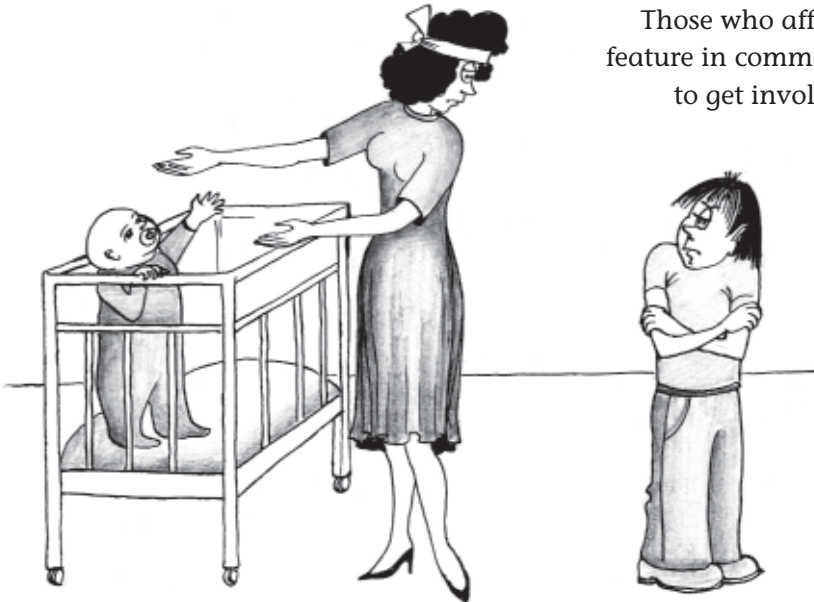
What is duty? Different people understand it in different ways. For some, duty includes only their own interests: "I have obligations only to myself; I am responsible for my own welfare." This is a rather egotistical outlook on life, not recognizing the connectedness one has toward others.

Others feel moral obligations toward their family and friends. For instance, imagine that a disreputable person was pursuing your sister or mother.

Would you intervene in this situation? Even if this person were much stronger than you, it is unlikely that you would simply ignore the situation. You would try in some way to help those you love. You simply would not be able to remain indifferent, and fear would not stop you.

Some people, out of a deeper sense of duty, are ready to help not only those whom they know and love but anybody in need, even if helping involves inconvenience and even risk to their own lives. Here we face the question: How broad is the circle of people whom we are ready to help? Students from my school? People from my city? Those of my nationality? Those whom I like? And what if a dirty beggar on the street needs my help?

When we speak about such a broad sense of duty, we first think of patriotism. All of us know about people whose sincere love for their country was a source of courage and heroism. During the Second World War, tens of thousands of people volunteered to join the army, motivated only by the desire to protect their homeland. They did it not because of an order, but out of conscience. Even in times of peace there always exist people who, from their love of country or of humanity, are ready to stand up for human rights and fight injustice. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Christian theolo-



gian who risked his life for many during the Second World War and ultimately died in a Nazi concentration camp, wrote:

When avoiding public fights, one hides within personal integrity. But one is forced to keep silence and to pretend that he doesn't see injustice around him. He doesn't make responsible actions, and his reputation remains unspotted, but the price for that is self-deception. Whatever he does, he won't be able to find peace because of the thought about what he hasn't done. He will either die because of this anxiety or will become a hypocrite.

What can I do?

How powerful is personal influence? Can one person change anything?

A person's power to influence others depends on only one thing — what kind of human being he is. If he is concerned about only his own well-being, he will not be long remembered in the hearts of others. He may bring suffering to other people. A self-centered person is especially terrifying when he has a lot of power. The history of the world is full of examples of rulers who caused great suffering for the sake of maintaining their own power. Personal influence of this kind may be impressive, but it benefits no one.

Many people think that real influence on the lives of others can come only from those who have power, money, and position. People with these attributes can indeed be influential. The more power one has, the easier it is to influence others. But there are many kinds of power — the power of money, the power of fear, and the power of love. All of us know about people who were born without advantages but who reached high achievement due solely to the power of their determination, talent and perseverance. If we decide beforehand that nothing good will come of us, then we limit our potential for influence.

Ultimately, the outcome of our life depends on the depth of our hearts. A deep heart can embrace many kinds of people and situations, expanding the sphere of one's positive influence. The more you love and the more generously you share your love with others, the more powerful will be your impact on the world. As we have seen, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. are examples of people who made a substantial impact on history.

Those who have chosen such a way of righteousness have faced many obstacles. The greater the person and the more his influence on the lives of others, the more opposition he faces. But a clear conscience will always be his reward. He will have the gratitude of those who recognize his purity and sincerity. Only history will judge his failings.

No human will be ever praised by everybody. If one is good, then evil people will find him bad and will either mock him or judge him. If one is evil, good people won't approve him. In order for one to be praised by everybody, one needs to pretend to be good in front of good ones, and evil in front of evil ones. But then both of them will see that he is false, and both will despise him. There is only one way — to be good and not to worry about the opinion of others, and to search for reward not in human opinions, but in oneself.

— Leo Tolstoy

The Decembrists

When we speak about personal influence in history, we face a question: If everything depends on personal integrity, why do failures take place? Sometimes, out of the most sincere motivation, people have tried to help their country, but their efforts resulted in complete disaster. How can we understand such people? Are their efforts useless?



In Russia, the “Decembrists” of 1825 are a good example of this kind of situation. A group of mostly young army officers organized a demonstration of 3,000 soldiers in St. Petersburg to call for a constitution and an end to serfdom. Seen as a dangerous threat to the tsar and autocracy, they were shot upon. About 50 demonstrators were killed and their leaders arrested. What did they achieve by their demonstration? Five of the leaders were hanged and dozens were sentenced to hard labor in mines, followed by exile in Siberia. As a consequence, their cause was weakened. The Decembrists were followed by a generation characterized by nihilism and lack of belief in the possibility of change. Only thirty years later, in 1856, the Decembrists were allowed to come back from Siberia. But only a few had survived. Was there no meaning to their idealistic efforts and their sacrifice?

Many questions have no easy answers. But think for a moment. Toward whom would you feel more sympathy: the Decembrists, or those who followed them a few decades later — terrorists who tried to eliminate the Russian monarchy with bombs?

Even in today’s Russia the lives of these Decembrists still inspire people. New books and movies about them continue to appear. One film, called “The Star of Happiness,” based on historical facts and actual documents, is a beautiful motion picture about true sacrifice, loyalty toward one’s country, and love.

Isn’t it clear that such people still have great influence years after their earthly lives came to an end?

What happened to the Decembrists was unfair and cruel. But can we consider their lives to have been without consequence? It is important to study what the Decembrists did while in exile, after they had been released from work in the mines—and about their wives, who followed them to Siberia.

While in Siberia, the Decembrists and their families were involved in education. They taught children, provided young people with books, and became the center of the spiritual and cultural life. Because of their influence many settlements in Siberia were transformed from tiny provincial villages into cities. The Decembrists brought with them a new spirit of freedom and a desire for knowledge. They established new traditions. This is the reason the Decembrists are still so respected in Russia.

And what about the wives of the Decembrists? Rarely can one find an example of a deeper, more sacrificial love than that shown by these courageous women. Let us read together a passage from the memoirs of one:

When I came to Chita, Princess Trubetskaya, Princess Volkonskaya, Muraviova, Naryshkina, Entaltseva and Davydova were already there. All of them had left their friends and families. Muraviova and Princess Volkonskaya had left also their small children — perhaps forever — and went to Siberia with a desire to share the destiny of their husbands, with the hope to live together with them; but even this hope wasn’t fulfilled. Having come to Chita, they had an opportunity to see their husbands only twice a week, each time for no more than a few hours. Every day they secretly tried to approach the walls to see their husbands, but even this often wasn’t successful. Soldiers were ordered not to allow anybody to come close to the prison, and it often happened that the soldier on guard, following the order, kicked the women out.

But even such circumstances could not stop these wives — ladies from the most aristocratic families of Russia. Our hearts cannot but respond to the lines Maria Volkonskaya wrote in her memoirs:



I think only about the minute when they will feel pity and imprison me together with my poor Sergei. To see him only twice a week is a torture. Believe me that one can find happiness anywhere, under any circumstances. It depends first of all on your conscience. When you follow your duty and do it willingly, you gain inner peace.

This woman had the right to write these words about happiness. For her they were not empty words or a slogan. Her life was encompassed in them.

One more example: After many requests, Pauline Gebl, a young Frenchwoman who couldn't speak a word of Russian, managed to get the tsar's permission to follow her bridegroom, Ivan Annenkov, to Siberia. Here is what their marriage ceremony looked like: "Joy and jokes disappeared when the bridegroom and two of his friends were brought to the church in their chains. The chains were taken off only at the church entrance. The ceremony wasn't long; the priest was in a hurry. After the ceremony all three — the bridegroom and his friends — were put into chains again and taken to prison." Thirty years of exile in Siberia were waiting for her. But here is what this amazing woman wrote in her memoirs about the time spent in Siberia together with the wives of the other Decembrists:

I need to say that there was a lot of poetry in our life. There were many difficulties, hard labor and sufferings, but also there was joy. We shared everything — joy and sadness. We were compassionate toward each other. We were connected by close friendship, and this friendship helped us to endure difficulties and forget about many things.

The personal influence of such people cannot be measured in words or compared to any external achievement. Wouldn't you also like to become an example of courage, self-sacrifice and love for others?

Something to think about



- Why do you think a person with high self-esteem is more likely to become involved in a situation like the one above?
- How can you tell if a person has high or low self-esteem? Does the way someone walks, talks and acts in general give you clues?
- What do you think of the expression "This person does not see himself as hopelessly controlled by his external environment, but in control of his own destiny"?

Interview



In pairs: Conduct an interview with a friend. Pretend that you are a person of great personal magnitude and that you have dedicated your life to the betterment of others. Decide what you have done and why. Share some of your experiences, and explain your outlook on life.

For Your Journal



Research the life of a historic person who fought for a righteous cause, trying to improve the lives of others.

- What was this person like?
- What did this person do?
- What did this person contribute?
- Imagine that you are this person. Why did you risk your life to help others?

What self-esteem looks like

People with poor self-esteem may ...

1. Believe deep down that they are not worth much.
2. Be frightened of making any mistakes.
3. Constantly wish for an “ideal” body.
4. Stay with activities and interests that are known and safe.
5. Be unable to accept compliments.
6. Be preoccupied with how they appear to others.
7. Either brag a lot and act superior or put themselves down and act inferior.
8. Either try to dominate others or let themselves be a doormat.
9. Engage in self-destructive behavior such as drug abuse and starvation diets.
10. Be either defensive to criticism or devastated by it.



People with healthy self-esteem can ...

1. Believe deep down that they are valuable.
2. Make mistakes and learn from them.
3. Accept their body even though it is not perfect.
4. Explore new opportunities and interests in order to grow.
5. Accept compliments.
6. Relate to other people spontaneously.
7. Be happy with themselves without feeling superior to others.
8. Treat others and themselves with respect.
9. Take care of themselves physically and emotionally.
10. Consider criticism as an opportunity for growth.

CHAPTER 39

Being You

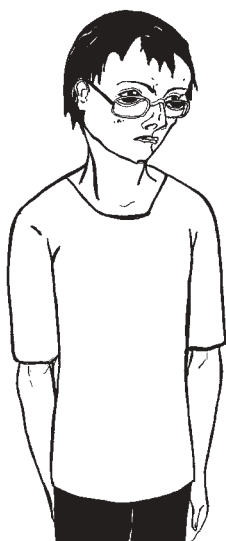
From time to time every person faces moments when he is not satisfied with himself. Perhaps you have also experienced them. How can you behave in such a situation? How do you protect your self-esteem? Of course, it would be wrong to dedicate all your life to self-admiration, but to be constantly in a bad mood because of personal imperfections cannot be the solution either. Let us look in more detail at these problems.

Confident talk

Misha admires Arnold Schwarzenegger. He has seen every one of his movies, and his favorite one is "Terminator 2," which he has seen at least three times. Misha has read a lot about Schwarzenegger, and he knows that his idol wasn't just born a successful, muscular, invincible hero, but that he had to work very hard at both the shape of his body and his career. But Misha knows that no matter how hard he works, he will never become like Arnold. Misha is 15 years old, very thin and very near-sighted. Misha hates his glasses, hates the pimples on his face, and sometimes hates just about everything about himself.

Today Misha, his parents, grandparents and about fifteen other relatives have gathered at the dacha of Misha's family to celebrate the 60th birthday of his grandmother. It's a beautiful summer's day and everybody feels relaxed and joyful — except Misha. Today is one of those days when Misha can't stand himself. This often happens: The happier the people are around him, the more miserable he feels.

Misha is sitting alone some distance away from the table where his mother and her sister have just served tea and cake, and where the others are talking to each other in small groups. Several of his relatives had tried to engage Misha in conversation earlier, but Misha answered them unwillingly





Self-esteem and self-respect

Self-esteem (belief in oneself) and self-respect (appreciation of oneself) are as necessary to our happiness as sunlight and water are to a growing and healthy plant.

Self-esteem and self-respect *are not* the same as self-centeredness, egoism, vanity, conceit, or arrogance. Usually people who do not have a genuine sense of self-worth, but instead feel low and inferior, try to prove that they are not inferior and often end up acting as if they are better than others, which is why they may seem conceited and arrogant. If you feel good about yourself, you don't feel the need to prove yourself to anyone because there is nothing to prove. You are who you are.

Self-respect and self-esteem are not self-centered. They lead to love and friendship just as naturally as a bud leads to a flower. By affirming your own worth, learning to appreciate and love the good in you, it is far easier to see and love the good in others.

so that after a while they gave up and left him alone. He also refused to play football with his cousin Vova, who is a little older and very athletic.

Misha has been watching his relatives for quite a while now, and he is thinking about his Uncle Pavel whom he doesn't meet very often because he lives far away in the Caucasus. Pavel has caught his attention several times already today because he is laughing a lot with the people who always gather around him. He seems like a magnet, attracting others. Misha notices this particularly because Pavel has many of the features that Misha doesn't like in himself. Pavel is at least as thin as Misha, and because he is very tall he looks even more like a stick than Misha. He is wearing glasses, too, and he is bald. But he doesn't seem to feel bad about it, and neither do the other people. There is something else that they like about him, which makes them want to be with him. Misha also would like to talk to Pavel, but he doesn't know how to go about it. And anyway, he doubts that Pavel would care too much for him, since he is probably too busy talking to all the other people.

Pavel has noticed for quite a while that Misha is sitting away from the others with a very unhappy face. Pavel knows that Misha is going through some difficulties in finding his true self. Misha's mother had talked to him about Misha earlier, and Pavel has been looking for an opportunity to speak to his nephew. As he sees Misha getting up and coming over to the table to get some cake, Pavel decides to approach him. He excuses himself and leaves the group of people he is with for the moment and walks over to join Misha. "Hi, Misha, can I join you for a while? Are you enjoying yourself?" "Yes, Uncle Pavel, it's such a beautiful day, isn't it," Misha answers, glad that his uncle is talking to him, but not sure how honestly he should answer his question. They both take a piece of cake and a cup of tea from the table, and then, following Pavel's suggestion, sit together on the grass a little way off.

Misha is very glad to be able to talk to Pavel, and Pavel, being a mature and experienced person, opens up Misha's heart very quickly. First they talk about superficial things, but before he knows it, Misha confides in his uncle and tells him how he feels about himself.

"You know, Uncle Pavel, sometimes I think nobody really likes me, because I'm so thin and look so weak. My classmates often make fun of me, especially in sports."

"Misha, I think I understand, because when I was your age, I went through similar feelings. I wanted to be handsome so that the girls in my class would pay attention to me. And I wanted to be strong and athletic so that I could punish those who made fun of me because of my glasses. Sometimes I felt so desperate about myself that I wished I were somebody else."

"Sometimes I wish that, too. But now you don't feel like that anymore? It doesn't matter to you that you are thin and that you wear glasses?"

"Now it doesn't, no, because I have understood that I am me not because of the way I look but because of the way I am. Do you understand the difference? You have to learn to accept yourself, and you have to learn to like yourself."



"But what if I don't like myself?"

"Then the people around you will also find it difficult to like you. The way somebody feels about himself is expressed in the way he acts, the way he talks and smiles and even by the look in his eyes. People around him respond to these signs, consciously or unconsciously. It is as if a person who hates himself radiates negative vibrations that push others away from him. On the other hand, people who like and respect themselves always attract others who want to be with them."

"Well, I don't know. It sounds good, but I'm not sure if it is true. In order for somebody to be popular in our class, it is more important that he has a nice leather jacket or a lot of money than that he likes himself."

"Misha, it's true that there are some people who value somebody's possessions or their external appearance or popularity more than their character. But don't worry

about these people. They don't make trustworthy friends. Since they relate to you because of what you have rather than what you are, they will leave you as soon as you lose your possessions or popularity. But don't worry about wearing the right clothes to attract other people. Worry instead about developing a character that attracts people."

"I don't see why others should be attracted to me, whether I like myself or not. There is absolutely nothing special about me!" said Misha.

"Misha, you are an attractive person simply because you are unique, because there is nobody in the whole world that is just like you. You are different from anybody else. There will never be another you. You have something to show and share with other people that no one else has. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"OK, I got the point: I'm unique. But I still don't know why this should appeal to others. Maybe my uniqueness doesn't attract others, but pushes them away instead."

"If that is really true, then it's up to you to change it. It is within your power to become the kind of person that you would be glad to know, a person you respect. Become reliable, take initiative and be helpful. Then you are sure to develop many friendships. Polish your diamond, Misha. You know what this means?"

"No!"

"When a gemologist finds a precious gem, it doesn't look so beautiful at first. All the dirt has to be scraped off, and then it has to be carefully cleaned and polished before its unique and perfect beauty shines through brilliantly. You are like a precious diamond, Misha, but that diamond still needs polishing."

At this point Pavel and Misha are interrupted. Misha's father invites them to come over to the table where a family picture is being taken. After this there is no further opportunity to continue the talk, but as Misha says goodbye to his uncle at the end of the day, he is very grateful to him for his advice. During the following week Misha finds himself thinking a lot about Pavel's words, and he finally decides to write him a letter to ask him a few more questions.

Dear Uncle Pavel,

I cannot forget what you said to me at Granny's birthday party. I think you are right, I have to learn to like myself more, because I want to become a person whom other people like to be with. But I don't know how to do this, practically speaking. I think you must know, because you are a person whom everybody likes (including me). Please tell me what you did to become like that.

And could you please answer this question? You said that I should worry about my character, not about the way I look. Does this mean that I should not try to look good at all? Is it wrong to buy fashionable clothes? Do you think it's OK for me to do some bodybuilding?

I think it must be very beautiful in the Caucasus now, and you are enjoying the summer. But I hope that you can visit us here in St. Petersburg again soon.

*With my best wishes,
Your nephew Misha*

And this is the answer that Misha receives from Pavel a few weeks later.

My dear Misha,

I was very happy to receive your letter and learn that my words have given you so much food for thought. I enjoyed our talk very much — I think you are a sincere and genuine person.

Let me answer your questions now. I don't think there's anything wrong with buying fashionable clothes to look nice. In fact, it is important to make yourself look as smart as you can, because it can help you feel good about yourself. Doing some bodybuilding is fine too; it will make your body feel good (as long as you don't overdo it). It is better not to compete with Schwarzenegger, though, because his body is quite different from yours. Accept that you are unique, and therefore different, and don't try to become a copy of somebody else. Whatever you do to make yourself look good — remember that other qualities are more important.

Inner beauty, for example. Inner beauty can balance physical imperfections, because a person who has a beautiful heart and mind will seem beautiful to others. Think of Granny. Did you notice during the birthday celebration that her skin isn't so beautiful anymore, all wrinkled up as it is? Her face looks a little like an old, shriveled apple. And yet Granny looks beautiful, because of her inner beauty and her heart of love.

I deeply respect your decision to learn to like yourself more and to become a person whom others want to have as a friend. I cannot promise that it will be easy, but as I told you already, I was very much like you when I was your age, and if I have been able to change, you can also. Here are some things I did to change my beliefs and feelings about myself step by step.

Following the advice of a person close to me, I looked into a mirror, smiled and said, "I like myself! I am satisfied with what I see. I am a beautiful person. Really! At least where it counts — in the heart." I admit I felt quite embarrassed at first. But I knew it was important because it was difficult to do. I repeated this every day for a long time.

I knew that I had to stop criticizing myself. There were so many things I didn't like about myself, and I was always quick to think, "I'm so bad, it's so hopeless, I can never become like that, it's no use trying to change," et cetera. I observed myself carefully and studied my own



words, thoughts, feelings, gestures, smile, and voice, et cetera. I made a point of reflecting on my day every evening. I analyzed what I had done right and what I had done wrong. Then I made a new goal for the next day. After a while I felt that I was improving, and my self-respect increased.

I had to learn to resist the temptation to compare myself with someone else. Instead I learned to respect other people for what they were, and their achievements, but also I respected myself for what I was and for my own rate of growth.

Another very effective technique I used was to write a love letter to myself every once in a while. In this letter I praised myself for all the qualities I liked about myself, and I just tried to be nice to myself.

And finally, because I thought that I was a rather unkind person, I started serving others, even in small ways. I asked people if they needed help when I saw them in need (sometimes I didn't feel like doing it, but I pushed myself to do it anyway). I sometimes even gave small gifts to people, without any other reason than just to surprise them and make them happy. Doing this helped me a lot to feel better about myself.

During this time I became more and more aware of my own uniqueness (remember, we talked about how each person has value just because they are unique). I discovered that I had certain talents and gifts different from anybody else I knew. People often told me that I was very good at imitating others, and so I began to develop this gift. Also, people told me that I was very sensitive and tender-hearted, and at first I didn't like that, because I wanted to be tough and never show any emotions. But after a while I started to recognize that these qualities were a gift too, and instead of denying these soft parts of my character, I started to accept them.

Well, Misha, now you go ahead and find out which of these methods work for you. And then write me to tell me about your progress. I am thinking of you.

With love, Pavel

Self-confidence

Your self-image is a creation you alone fashion. You are the master designer of your self-esteem. Confidence in yourself is important. Become a champion of love; dwell on positive thoughts, dreams, and images. Have a rich and vivid imagination.

Self-confidence involves confronting life. If we shy away, we climb on and ride an inner merry-go-round from which we cannot easily get off. Confront life as it is. If you go to the back door and see a lot of snow, don't turn around and go through the front door. Cope with it.

When you nurture a positive and optimistic attitude, you will feel your own value. Life is not always easy or beautiful; it is inevitable that you have to trudge

through struggles as well as climb summits. But there is one thing to remember, regardless of whether you stand on a peak or in a valley — *we are ultimately able to master anything if our desire and motivation are strong enough*. That knowledge alone can give you incredible self-confidence.

Sometimes we reflect on the things we should accomplish as well as those we dream about, and then tend to stamp the word "impossible" across the plans and don't complete them.

The only limitations upon us are the ones we set ourselves.

True or healthy self-confidence is never promoted by rating yourself against another.

If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Why not erase the
word "impossible"
from your vocabulary?



Share your experiences with people. Learn from each other and help one another, yet do not ignore the fact that we all have different personalities. The principal tool every person must use to relate with others is heart. But no two hearts are the same; no two people are totally alike. So be confident in who YOU are!

How do you see yourself?

How do you see yourself: as lovable or unlovable,
or somewhere in between?

lovable	a b c d e	unlovable
likable	()	unlikable
attractive	()	unattractive
overweight	()	underweight
punctual	()	tardy
careful	()	careless
friendly	()	unfriendly
talented	()	incapable
accepted	()	rejected
diligent	()	lazy
loyal	()	disloyal
kind	()	unkind
sincere	()	insincere

Which qualities would you like to improve?
Number them in the order of their importance to you.

For Your Journal



Write a small story describing a situation in which a person passes up a good opportunity because of lack of self-confidence or because he's afraid he will fail. You can also illustrate the story so that it would look like a comic.

Princess Maria

From War and Peace, by Leo Tolstoy

One of the heroines of Tolstoy's novel War and Peace is Princess Maria. One day she returns to her room with a sad, frightened expression — one that she wears often. She looks into the mirror and finds an ugly, weak body and a thin face. Her sad eyes gaze back at her, deep and shining. These eyes, despite the simple face, could take on such beauty, especially in moments when the princess did not think about herself. Soon her maid and the duchess began to make a dress for her, wanting to make her feel pretty. They believed that a dress could bring beauty to life and began their work.

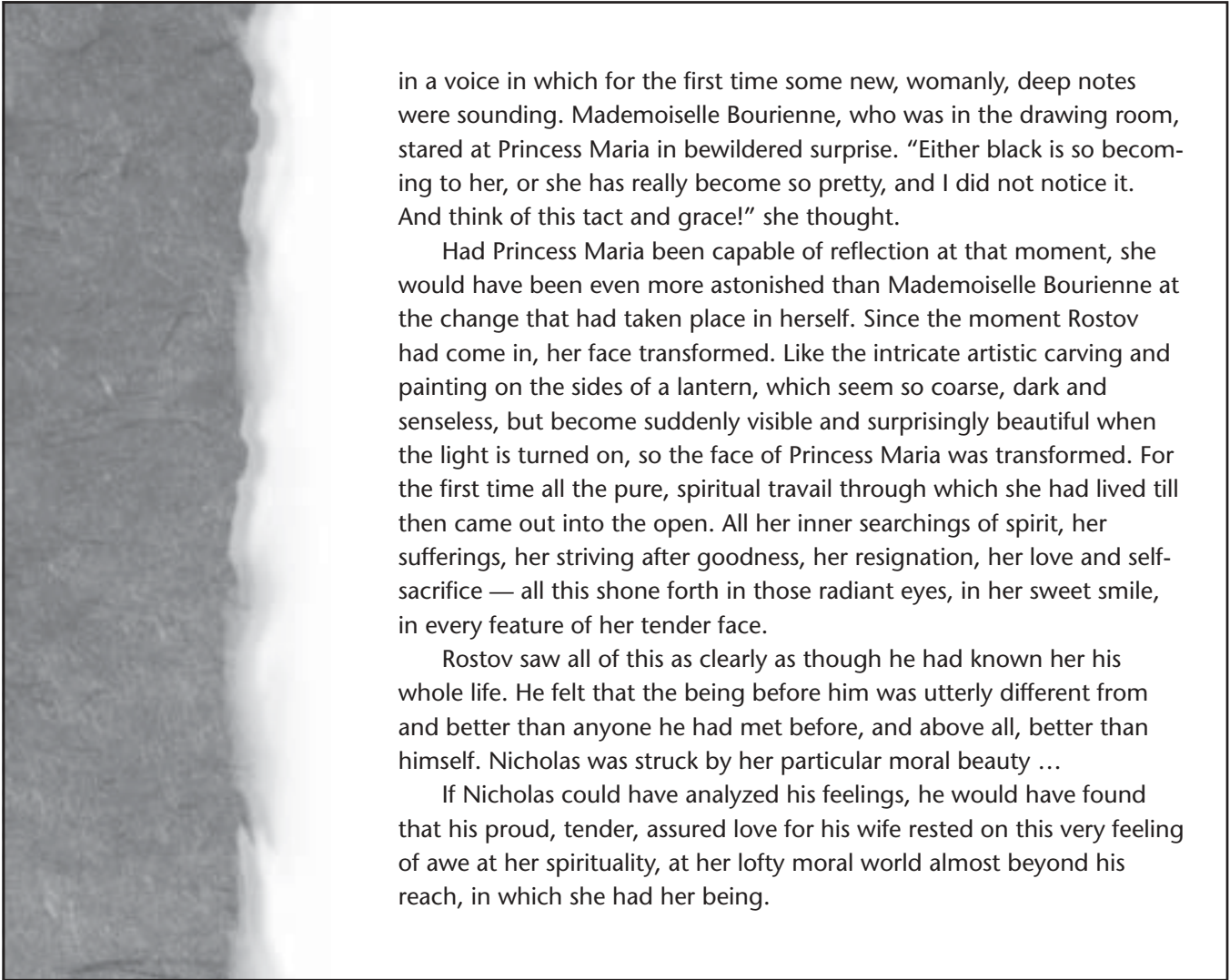
"No really, my dear, this dress is not pretty," said Lise, looking sideways at Princess Maria from a little distance...

It was not the dress, but the face and whole figure of Princess Maria that were not pretty, but neither Mademoiselle Bourienne nor the little princess felt this, they still thought that if a blue ribbon were placed in the hair, the hair combed up, and the blue scarf arranged lower on the best maroon dress, and so on, all would be well. They forgot that the frightened face and the figure could not be altered, and that however they might change the setting and adornment of that face it would still remain piteous and plain ...

Mademoiselle Bourienne and the little princess had to own to themselves that Princess Maria in this guise looked very plain, worse than usual ...

When Rostov entered the room, the princess lowered her head for a moment as if to give him time to greet her aunt, and then at the very moment Nicholas addressed her, she lifted her head and her shining eyes met his look. With a movement full of dignity and grace, she stood up with a joyful smile, held out her thin soft hand and spoke





in a voice in which for the first time some new, womanly, deep notes were sounding. Mademoiselle Bourienne, who was in the drawing room, stared at Princess Maria in bewildered surprise. "Either black is so becoming to her, or she has really become so pretty, and I did not notice it. And think of this tact and grace!" she thought.

Had Princess Maria been capable of reflection at that moment, she would have been even more astonished than Mademoiselle Bourienne at the change that had taken place in herself. Since the moment Rostov had come in, her face transformed. Like the intricate artistic carving and painting on the sides of a lantern, which seem so coarse, dark and senseless, but become suddenly visible and surprisingly beautiful when the light is turned on, so the face of Princess Maria was transformed. For the first time all the pure, spiritual travail through which she had lived till then came out into the open. All her inner searchings of spirit, her sufferings, her striving after goodness, her resignation, her love and self-sacrifice — all this shone forth in those radiant eyes, in her sweet smile, in every feature of her tender face.

Rostov saw all of this as clearly as though he had known her his whole life. He felt that the being before him was utterly different from and better than anyone he had met before, and above all, better than himself. Nicholas was struck by her particular moral beauty ...

If Nicholas could have analyzed his feelings, he would have found that his proud, tender, assured love for his wife rested on this very feeling of awe at her spirituality, at her lofty moral world almost beyond his reach, in which she had her being.

What makes this image so appealing? At the beginning of the novel we see Princess Maria as an unattractive, reserved girl living in a remote mansion together with her old father and a French companion, Mademoiselle Bourienne, whose company bores her. Describing the external appearance of Princess Maria, Tolstoy stresses the irregular features of her face and her heavy walk. The princess herself realizes that she is unattractive. When thinking of the future, she is afraid even to dream about love and having a family, even though that's what she most deeply desires.

Just try to imagine yourself in such a situation. Few of us would keep our dignity and not fall into despair thinking about the long years that lie ahead, filled only with the dictatorship of one's father and complete loneliness of the soul. Who of us would be able to resist the temptation to run away from the mansion using any means — to buy new clothes, to participate in the life of "higher spheres" so as to meet someone to marry? Princess Maria would be a rich bride, and undoubtedly there would be numerous young men ready to marry — not her, but her money. And this is the way it happened to Anatoly Kuragin, whom his father brought to arrange his marriage to Princess Maria.

If Princess Maria simply submitted to her sad destiny or married only to escape from her father, it wouldn't bring her internal peace and happiness. She would be going against her own principles and would be betraying herself. She simply couldn't do it. The most amazing of her qualities is her deep moral purity and ability to remain herself even in circumstances that would plunge most people into absolute despair.

When faced with difficult times, she didn't look for easy solutions. "How can I suppress in my heart these evil thoughts? How can I reject evil desires forever?" And as soon as she asked, God answered in her own heart: "Don't desire anything for yourself, don't search, don't worry, don't envy. The future of people and your own future should be unknown to you; but you should live so as to be ready for anything." Princess Maria didn't think about the future too much, but simply lived, trying to help others, to love even those whom she didn't like.

This faithfulness to her deepest intuitions, to her spiritual purity that captured the essence of her special beauty, brought her great reward. Some time passed and Nicholas Rostov appeared. First he was attracted to the princess just by the unusual circumstances of their first meeting. Step by step, the young Count Rostov started to notice in this girl a surprising and unfamiliar beauty. And Princess Maria was also transformed when she fell in love with Nicholas Rostov. There appeared a femininity and charm about her that amazed everyone who knew her.

Nicholas' and Maria's love faced many challenges, but they married and created a family. In a few years the Rostovs had three children. They lived together in such harmony that "even Sonya and the old countess who wanted out of jealousy to see some quarrels between them, couldn't find anything to accuse them about."

Something to
think about



- What do you think determines happiness?
- How important is it in difficult circumstances not to follow some easy compromise that life offers?
- Where can we find support in moments of deep crisis?
- What determines the true value of human life?
- How can you remain faithful to your true self?

CHAPTER 40

Friendship

Friends are like crystals or jewels, something precious to be treasured. Just as you put jewels in a safe, you should keep your friendships deep within the safe of your heart. As with real gems, occasionally you will need to take them out and polish them. When you see your friend shine in the light of your love, you will feel joyful and happy. That is the nature of friendship. Unfortunately, people do not discover very many jewels in their lives, and consequently there is a great deal of vacant space in their hearts.

There are many sicknesses of the heart. The majority of them are in some way related to loneliness. People who are alone often feel a decreased sense of their own value and importance. If we develop true friends who will stick with us through thick and thin, we will not be so lonely.

We live within a
garden of beautiful people.
Have you stopped long enough
to smell the
different fragrances of
the roses, the lilacs, or the marigolds?
If we really take the time to watch,
they will bloom
in front of our eyes.
We have only to pick those
we want to cultivate as friends
and transplant them
into the fertile soil of love
within the garden of our hearts.
When we water and tend them,
they become the kind of friends
whom you can call
a forever friend.



Especially for teenagers, belonging to a certain group of friends and being accepted and liked by others may be one of the most important things in life. Teenagers often feel closer to their best friends than to their own family.

A true friend is someone who accepts and understands us deeply and with whom we can share any problem. We can completely trust such a friend, freely disclosing the innermost secrets in our heart, knowing that our friend will safeguard them. There is nothing to hide from a true friend, because his heart is one and the same with ours. We all need this kind of friend. The first step to finding such a friend is to become a true friend ourselves.

Friends come to understand each other with experience over time. Learning to understand someone is the basis of respect, because we begin to acknowledge each other's value. This may take some effort, time, and quite a bit of patience. But when we make that effort, we will discover the value of our friendship. Creating harmony in a friendship takes effort from *both* sides.

The quickest way to become a friend and to have a friend is to give the most valuable thing you possess — your heart.

Here is what some teenagers had to say about best friends:

- ✕ We're like sisters. We don't have to pretend or put on an act around each other. We can just be ourselves. (age 13)
- ✕ Your best friend is someone who understands you and who likes you regardless of rumors or what anyone else says. ... You can get irate with each other and still be friends. ... You can talk about anything with your best friend. (age 14)

- ✕ You can just be silent. You don't always have to talk or explain everything. Your best friend just understands. You don't ever have to feel uncomfortable. You don't have to worry about losing her. She's always your best friend. (age 15)
- ✕ My best friend and I have been through a lot together. We've shared good times and also hard times. ... Your best friend sticks by you, no matter what happens. A lot of times, if there's something rotten going on, other people stay away or avoid you or act like they hardly ever even knew you. Your best friend sticks around! (age 16)

The highest level of friendship can be extended between brothers and sisters. Referring to each other as "brother" or "sister" is a natural gesture that we may

understand too simply. Brothers and sisters are often ready to give their lives for one another.

Relationships between brothers and sisters can also be quite difficult. When children don't feel enough love from their parents, they may take their frustrations out on their younger brother or sister. Anyone who constantly receives this kind of mean and unfair treatment is certainly hurt and scarred by it. The youngest member in a family is often afraid to be himself and feels inferior to his older siblings. Far too often, the competitiveness between siblings can be outright brutal or verbally and emotionally abusive.

Real brotherhood or sisterhood is achieved only when we become true friends. Likewise, true friends should establish such a close, deep and trusting relationship that they feel blood-related, like real brothers or sisters.

Who has such a friend? Although the majority of people in this world long for love and friends, most do not think so deeply about developing relationships.

There is much more to friendship than being friendly. If we want to have friends, we have to become keenly aware of and sensitive to their needs. Before becoming a friend, in a sense we have to become a servant. We need to start at the bottom, but eventually we will reach the summit. Friendship always develops and matures, even after it is established; it does not stay static but changes like the seasons. A relationship of love takes a tremendous amount of effort and sacrifice. Supreme love is unreserved and unlimited. The deepest friendship is guided by unconditional love.



LETTER from a FRIEND

I just had to write to tell you how much I love you and care for you. Yesterday I saw you walking and laughing with your friends; I hoped that soon you'd want Me to walk along with you too. So I painted you a sunset to close your day and whispered a cool breeze to refresh you. I waited — you never called — I just kept on loving you.

As I watched you fall asleep last night, I wanted so much to touch you. I spilled moonlight onto your face — trickling down your cheeks as so many tears have. You didn't even think of Me. ... I wanted so much to comfort you.

The next day I EXPLODED a brilliant sunrise into glorious morning for you. But you woke up late and rushed off to school — you didn't even notice. My sky became cloudy and My tears were the rain.

I love you! Oh, if you'd only listen. I really love you. I try to say it in the quiet of the green meadow and in the blue sky. The wind whispers My love throughout the treetops and spills it into the vibrant colors of all the flowers. I SHOUT it to you in the thunder of the great waterfalls and compose love songs for birds to sing for you. I warm you with the clothing of My sunshine and perfume the air with nature's sweet scent. My love for you is deeper than any ocean and greater than any need in your heart. If you'd only realize how I care. ...

Parents are just that way. So please call on Me soon. No matter how long it takes, I'll wait, because ...

I LOVE YOU ...

God



Sometimes the concept of friendliness is misunderstood and equated with that of permissiveness. The two are not synonymous. A true friend will point out if you have made an error. His tenderness and deep love lie beneath the words he speaks. A person who loves or respects you or is friendly to you is not automatically your friend. If he knowingly lets you do something that harms yourself or others without trying to stop you, he is not a real friend. The same is true for any good parent or brother or sister as well. We cannot force our friends to change, but we should try to help each other to live conscientious lives.

Every human being needs friends — brothers and sisters in the true meaning of these words. When you find yourself in danger or in need, you will truly be able to appreciate a friend. If you have to rely totally upon yourself, you may feel hopeless.

True friends care about you and your real problems. When you are in trouble or have difficulties in your family life, the most valuable thing is the support of friends. That's what friends are for. Through good times and bad times, you can always count on a friend to be at your side.

Problems with best friends

There can be problems, even between the best of friends. There may be times when the two of you fight with each other. But when you think about it, it's not

surprising that best friends fight. Any time two people are especially close, there's bound to be some fighting from time to time. In fact, an important part of a friendship is knowing that the two of you can fight and still be friends. When you have a close friend, you can let out angry feelings without having to worry that the friendship will be over. Sometimes having a problem or a fight and making up brings you closer than ever. Still, while you're in the middle of the fight, it can feel pretty bad. It helps to remember that, as awful as it might feel to fight with your best friend, it's bound to happen at least once in a while.

Below is a list of some problems with best friends that people have told us about. Circle the problems that you've run into. At the end of the list, add any other problems that you've experienced that aren't on this list.

What the Buddha said about good friends

There are four friends who should be reckoned as good-hearted: the helper; the friend who is the same in happiness and adversity; the friend of good counsel; the friend who sympathizes.

On four grounds the friend who is a helper is to be reckoned as good-hearted. He protects you when you are without protection; he guards your property when you are in danger; he is a shelter for you when you are afraid; when you have tasks to perform, he gives more help than what you may need.

On four grounds the friend who is the same in happiness and adversity is to be reckoned as good-hearted. He tells you his secrets; he keeps secret your secrets; in your troubles he does not forsake you; he lays down even his life for your sake.

On four grounds the friend who declares what you need to do is to be reckoned as good-hearted. He restrains you from doing wrong; he encourages you to do what is right; he informs you of what you had not heard before; he reveals to you the way to heaven.

On four grounds the friend who sympathizes is to be reckoned as good-hearted. He does not rejoice over your misfortunes; he rejoices over your prosperity; he restrains anyone who is speaking ill of you; he commends anyone who is praising you.

- ✗ Your parents don't approve of your best friend and don't like you spending time together, or your best friend's parents don't approve of you.
- ✗ Your best friend acts one way when you're alone and another way when you're in a group of people.
- ✗ Your best friend is sometimes thoughtless and makes rude remarks, criticizes you, or does other things that hurt your feelings.
- ✗ Your friendship is changing. You just aren't as close as you used to be.



-
- When you were my age, did you have a best friend? If so, tell me about this person. Who was she/he? How did the two of you get to be friends? What did you like about this person?
 - Do you still know this person? If so, how often do you see him or her? How do you stay in touch with each other? If not, how and why did the two of you end your friendship or lose touch with each other?
 - I'd like to read you a list of problems people sometimes have with their best friends. (Read aloud the above list.) Did you and your best friend ever run into any of these problems or any other problems? If so, how did you feel about it at the time? How do you feel about it now that you're older? How did things turn out? If you had this same problem today, would you handle it any differently?
 - Right now I'm having a problem with my best friend. (Explain one or more of the problems you're having and how you feel about the problem.) Did you ever have this problem or a similar one? If so, tell me about it. How did you handle the problem? What would you do if you were me? What advice do you have for me?

- ✗ Your best friend is jealous or possessive and is hurt if you have other close friends, or you feel hurt when your best friend has other close friends.
- ✗ Your best friend is too changeable. One day you're best friends; the next day you're not.
- ✗ You have two best friends who don't get along with each other. You feel pulled between them.
- ✗ Your best friend doesn't keep the secrets you've told him or her.

- ✗ You feel very close to your best friend, but hardly anybody else likes him or her. People around you wonder why you're friends with such a strange person.

Although there is no easy solution to such a problem, talking about it with an older person may help. Someone older than you might have gone through these same problems and have some helpful advice. This person might be your mother, your father, an elder brother or sister, a teacher, or someone else to whom you feel close.

One way to obtain useful advice from the person you've chosen is to probe his or her memory through some thought-provoking questions. Questions such as the ones listed to the left should start the person thinking seriously about your problems and increase your chances of having a good talk and of getting helpful advice.

Something to
think about



...your friendships

1. What were your first childhood friendships like?
2. How are your current friendships like those childhood friendships?
3. What kind of friends would you like to have in the future?
4. Do you feel good enough to have friends? Why or why not?
5. What do you fear most in the area of friendship?
6. What do you expect of your friends?
7. What do you give to your friends?
8. How can you be a better friend?
9. Are you someone's best friend?

...your best friend

1. Do you have a best friend?
2. Do you think that it is good to have more than one best friend?
2. What is the main reason that you are best friends?
3. What do you like most in your friend?
4. What bothers you most about your friend?
5. What do you think it is that your friend likes most about you?
6. What is it about you that bothers your friend the most?
7. What is the best time you and your friend ever had?
8. What is the worst fight you and your friend ever had?
9. If you don't have a best friend, why do you think this is so?

For Your
Journal



Do you have any of the following attitudes?

My friends don't support me. Everyone is so judgmental. Nobody sees it my way. My boundaries are not respected. I can't keep friends for too long. I can't let my friends really know me. I give my friends advice for their own good. I don't know how to be a friend. I don't know how to ask for help from my friends. I don't know how to tell a friend "no."

CHAPTER 41

The Most Noble Life

Every nation has heroes. If we pay close attention to those who are remembered and known as most noble, we can recognize that most of them had one thing in common: They were people of goodness and lived lives of goodness.

What is a truly good person? If we do not know the standard by which a good person is measured, then we will not be able to clearly distinguish between good and evil.

What is goodness? What is evil? Why does every nation keep in its memory its national heroes? Why are the founders of religions still respected by so many, and why is it, even though history undergoes major changes and revolutions take place, that their teachings don't change? This is an important question. It is because the values that these heroes taught are universal and eternal — beyond historical periods, national boundaries, race, or custom. "Loving one's enemy" can transform a person's life in just as powerful a way whether this teaching is practiced in a modern city or in a rural village in Palestine two thousand years ago.

What kind of character do noble people maintain? Their character is seen through a consistent and reliable relationship between the mind and body in which the mind is stronger and controls the body. Ordinary people often experience inner confusion and conflict when facing temptations in life. For instance, if we have an opportunity to cheat during an important exam, or if by a small betrayal we can gain the friendship of a person we value — how shall we act? Is it 100 percent predictable that we will act in accordance with our highest conscience or the highest standard of values we know? When an ordinary person feels temptation, he often gives in to it, but a person of goodness is different. Although he may be pulled around somewhat, his feet are firmly anchored.

All people of goodness had to discover certain guiding principles. During their own period of uncertainty, they learned to deal with temptation and thought out their standards, until finally they had a rock-like foundation within themselves.

Acts of love and sacrifice characterize the way of goodness. To be a good friend, we must be willing to sacrifice for the sake of our friends. We can't always do only what we want to do. If we want to have friends, we have to give up our own interests sometimes and choose to do those things that our friends like to do. Often we have to put aside our own needs and desires in order to take care of a friend who is in need of our help or support. If you are a person who supports and cares for your friends, even when it is difficult, your friends will never leave you and they will come to like you more and more. A loving person is continuously growing.

When husband and wife live for each other's sake, a good marriage will be the result. Many times individuals must adjust their point of view or shift their priorities in order to maintain a harmonious relationship. Good parents sacrifice for the sake

of their children. How many times did your mother sacrifice her sleep to change your diapers and feed you when you were a baby? What if she had decided to stop after she had changed 500 diapers and fed you 1,000 times because she was tired of sacrificing for you? Do you think it was a good thing that she continued to take care of you, even though it must have been very difficult at times?

Using people for your own sake, in contrast, assures a quick pathway to self-destruction. If you decide to live for the sake of only yourself, then you will never experience love. Love starts only when we share what we have with others. This is captured by the classic Charles Dickens tale *A Christmas Carol* in which Ebenezer Scrooge, unhappy despite all his riches, learns to experience joy when he discovers how to give to others. When Scrooge shares his wealth with members of his family and community, he becomes a source of love and happiness.



From this perspective, what will happen to a person who invests something for the sake of others? The result is that his investment will multiply, even though it seems that he risks losing everything. Within a family, if a person serves his parents well and puts his brother and sister before himself, as time goes by he will certainly become the center of that family. According to the principle of love, the more we live for others, the higher the level of love that will be realized.

Jesus himself practiced this principle of love. The result of his love and sacrifice became the realization of a higher ethical life for Christians around the world. Another example of this principle of love is the beloved Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity minister to persons who have been left to die in the streets of India, taking them in and treating them with care and dignity. She has inspired others by her life of service. She herself is physically small and fragile, but as a woman living for the sake of others, she has become the strongest of all. She once said:

What these people need even more than food and shelter is to be wanted. They understand that even if they only have a few hours left to live, they are loved. Make us worthy, Lord, to serve those throughout the world who live and die poor and hungry.

To the degree that a person seeks his own interest, he is inclined to evil; and to the degree that he thinks about others, he is that much a better person. In the final analysis, who is a noble person? He is the one who is not corrupted by selfish desire and who does not try to take advantage of others in order to push himself ahead. He is the person whom you or anyone could absolutely trust. He would never betray you under any circumstances. Noble people are those who live with a noble purpose. They live for something greater than themselves. They devote themselves to that purpose and do not change.

All of us know people who have dedicated their lives to unselfish service of others — in the realms of science, art, religion, and in the service of their country, especially in times of trial. They help others by their example of wholesomeness and determination. Their lives are based on pure conscience, and the values of truth, beauty, goodness, and love. Such individuals are universally regarded as people of value.

The virtues and guiding principles lived by these noble men and women enlighten the heart and conscience of all people regardless of nationality, race, custom, geographical location or historical era. They have taught us that the most serious and important challenge a human being can take upon himself is to become a person of true love. And the broader this love, the more noble memories will a person leave for generations to come. One may love only himself, or only his family or his people or nation. But the greatest standard of love can only be achieved if we are able to overcome our prejudices and limitations so as to share our love with anybody we meet. If we can do this, we too can become extraordinary men and women.

Let us look at some examples of noble people and those who lived a saintly life.

In the history of any country you can find famous people who are remembered for many centuries after their death. They are great saints and religious figures, scientists and statesmen, writers and artists, generals and political leaders, and many others. Some of them are known to everyone, and others are lesser known. However, all of their names and deeds are carefully preserved in their nation's memory. Their lives have been examples of devotion and self-sacrifice for the sake of the nation, and in some cases, for the sake of the world. They demonstrate how a person can overcome any obstacle, grief or temptation. They show the power of the human spirit and of love. Their lives and deeds can be regarded as setting the highest moral and spiritual standard, and undoubtedly, they comprise the spiritual wealth of a nation.

The following two sections are taken from the book by M. Soloviev, "General Readings of Russian History."

The trader and the prince

The year 1611 took place during what is called the Time of Troubles, an era of confusion and chaos for Russia. During this period there was a vicious fight to control the throne, which resulted in a decade of ever-changing tsars. The last of the tsars to rule at this time was Basil Shuiski, but he was quickly dethroned and took shelter in the serenity of being a monk. Polish troops were attacking Russia and had already captured Moscow. The patriarch had been taken into custody. Throughout the turmoil handfuls of citizens traded their loyalty to Russia in return for security, and in a short episode the city of Novgorod was seized.

But it was then that people appeared who proved capable of opposing the enemy, not for the sake of glory or profit but only because of the call of their heart and out of love of their country.

In the cells of the Monastery of the Trinity and St. Sergius, scribes composed admonishing charters and sent them to many Russian towns and regiments. The summons to purification reached Nizhny Novgorod and was read in front of all the citizens. And then the mayor of the town, the butcher and cattle-dealer Kuzma Minin, addressed the people: "If we are to help the state of Moscow, then why spare our goods? Nothing shall we spare. We shall sell all we possess and go to seek a man to stand up for the Russian land and become our leader." Next they called for soldiers and raised money for their equipment. But even before this they had to find a commander who could lead the troops to Moscow. At that time a famous commander, Prince Dmitry Mikhailovich Pozharsky, lived not far from there, recovering from wounds he had received in defending Moscow against the Poles. Pozharsky answered the summons of the Nizhny Novgorod citizens, saying, "I am glad to hear your appeal, ready to go right away, but first choose someone from your

own people to help me in such a great deed and raise money with me.” The citizens of Nizhny Novgorod chose Minin.

Pozharsky took the leadership of the army, which was made up of soldiers, noblemen, and landlords. Those landlords who joined the army were unable to support themselves from their ruined estates, so the citizens allotted funds for their maintenance. Minin was in charge of the country’s liberation.

As soon as the news was spread that the people of Nizhny Novgorod had revolted and were ready to make any sacrifice, soldiers came from every direction to join them.

A year later Minin and Pozharsky’s national home guard liberated Moscow from the Polish troops. The departure of the Poles made it possible to elect a new tsar, Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov. That was the end of the Times of Trouble, so hard for Russia, which had lasted 20 years and brought so much grief and suffering.

In Moscow there is a famous monument to Minin and Pozharsky in Red Square. There is an inscription on the pedestal: “To citizen Minin and Prince Pozharsky from grateful Russia.” Pay attention to the sequence — a simple citizen comes first, and only then stands the name of the nobleman, a prince! Russia appreciated the heroic deed of Kuzma Minin. That man was not a statesman or a military strategist. He was a cattle dealer, but he loved his country passionately and possessed an extraordinary spiritual force. He was able to shoulder a responsibility that no one else could accept at that time! When Russia’s forces were ruined by wars and calamities, Minin managed to revive the nation by the force of his spirit and by his personal example, to raise money and to create the national home guard that finally liberated Russia.

The spiritual force and the feeling of personal responsibility for the fate of their country manifested by Minin and Pozharsky became an unforgettable example for all Russian citizens. Two centuries later, in 1812, Napoleon’s army began to advance on Russia. Tsar Alexander issued a manifesto in which he addressed the people with the following words: “Let the enemy meet Pozharsky in every nobleman ... and Minin in every citizen. Unite, all of you: With the cross in your hearts and with weapons in your hands, you can be overcome by no human forces.”



The Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fyodorovna

The Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fyodorovna was the sister of the last Russian empress, Alexandra Fyodorovna. A woman of deep faith and extraordinary integrity, she devoted her life to founding charities and financing a number of institutions and committees.

During the Russian-Japanese War (1904-1905) the duchess contributed several fully equipped medical trains. Every day she visited hospitals where she supported the widows and orphans of deceased Russian soldiers with both money and care.

The life of Elizaveta Fyodorovna was full of severe trials. In 1911 the anarchist I.P. Kalyayev assassinated Elizaveta's husband — the general-governor of Moscow, Grand Duke Sergey Alexandrovich Romanov.

Although she grieved greatly over the loss of her husband, Elizaveta Fyodorovna followed the Christian example and begged the tsar to have mercy upon the assassin.

After that event, the grand duchess invested her money in the founding of the Cloister of Martha and Mary, a monastery in Moscow. She herself lived within the walls of the cloister.

Soon she also founded a charity hospital (employing the best doctors of the city), a chemist's shop, an orphanage for girls, and a library around the cloister. Elizaveta Fyodorovna devoted all her life to serving people. She lived the life of a nun and worked at the hospital as a nurse.

In April 1918 Elizaveta Fyodorovna was arrested, and on the night of July 17-18 she was shot along with the other members of the royal family. As witnesses testify, she died with the words of the prayer: "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do."

In 1992 the Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fyodorovna was canonized as a holy martyr. These are the words from the Act of Canonization of the Russian Orthodox Church:

The Grand Duchess Elizaveta, the foundress of the Marfo-Mariinsky Monastery in Moscow, devoted her pious Christian life to charity, to helping the poor and the sick. She received the martyr's crown on July 5 (old calendar), 1918. The Sanctified Council, having considered her feat and being convinced of her sufferings, resolved unanimously to canonize the Grand Duchess Elizaveta as a holy martyr.



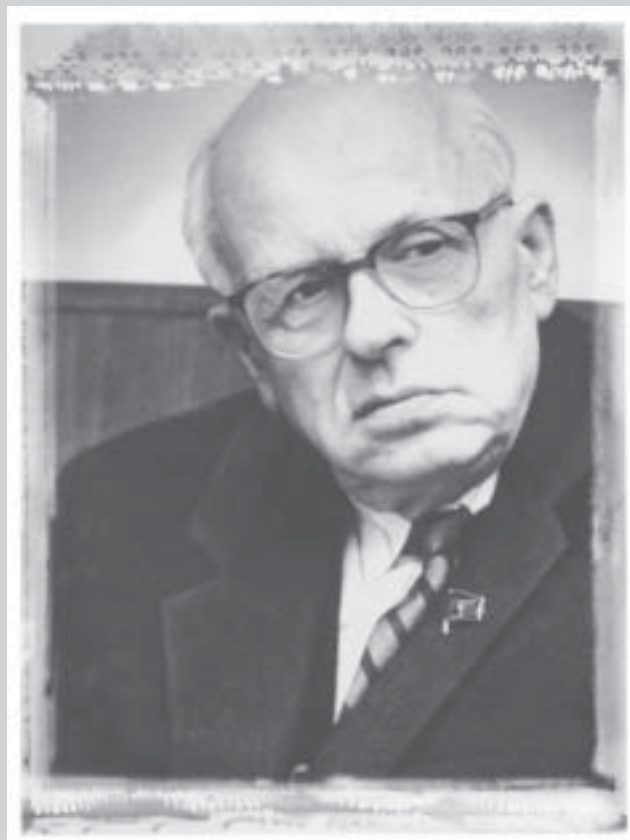
Andrei Sakharov

Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov was born on May 21, 1921. After finishing school with excellence in 1938, he entered the Physics Department of Moscow University and graduated with excellence during the war, in 1942. A few years later he became the leader of a scientific association working on nuclear weapons. For the next twenty years he and his colleagues worked in top-secret conditions, first in Moscow, then in a special secret scientific center. All were confident of the importance of their work and felt overwhelmed by its grandiosity. In 1953 he was elected an academician of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. In the following decade Sakharov changed his political views. He began to see the moral problem surrounding the development of nuclear weapons and wrote in his autobiography:

Starting at the end of the '50s I began to speak actively for stopping or limiting nuclear tests. In 1961, because of this, I had a conflict with Khrushchev and in 1962 with the Minister of Medium Machine Building, Slavsky. I was one of the initiators of the Moscow agreement of 1963 about the banning of nuclear tests in three spheres (in the atmosphere, in water, and in space). From 1964 on, and especially in 1967, the circle of problems I was concerned about grew wider.

In 1966-67 I first spoke in defense of those who were repressed. By 1968 there appeared the need for expanded, open and frank speech. So an article appeared, entitled "Thoughts About Progress, Peaceful Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom." In fact, these very topics seven years later were marked in the title of my Nobel lecture — "Peace, Progress and Human Rights." I consider these topics to be fundamentally important and closely interconnected. This speech was the turning point in my life. It became widely known throughout the whole world. In the Soviet press "Thoughts" were long not spoken about, then they began to be mentioned in a disapproving manner. Many critics, though sympathizing, considered my thoughts to be naive and unrealistic. Now, 13 years later, I still think that some important turning points of world and even Soviet policy lie in the trend of these thoughts.

Since 1970, the protection of human rights and the protection of people who were victims of political reprisals became my main occupation. My participation in the Committee on Human Rights was one of the expressions of this position. Since July 1968, after my "Thoughts" were published abroad, I was deprived of secret work and the privileges of the Soviet elite. Since 1972, the pressure on myself and members of my family became



stronger, repression was growing around me, I learned about them more and more, and almost every day I had to speak for someone. Often I spoke on the problems of peace and disarmament, freedom of contact and movement, freedom of information and beliefs, against execution, and about the preservation of the environment and nuclear energy.

In 1975 I was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace. It was a great honor for me, the recognition of the achievements of the whole human rights movement in the USSR. In January 1980 I was deprived of all government benefits and deported to Gorky, where I live in conditions of almost complete isolation and under incessant police surveillance. This action by the authorities is absolutely unlawful; it is one of the links of political repression in our country in recent years.

I am not a professional politician; maybe that is why I am always concerned with questions of the aim and result of my actions. I think that only moral criteria together with objectivity can be a kind of compass in these complex and contradictory problems. I abstain from particular prognoses, but today, as ever, I believe in the power of the human mind and spirit.

Andrei Sakharov

Gorky, Russia, March 24, 1981

What was so extraordinary about this person? Why do so many people treat him with such respect? Although the style of his writing is not beautiful, behind it stand an unshakable strength of spirit, courage and crystal-clear honesty. These qualities brought several generations of Russians to see in Andrei Sakharov the symbol of goodness and the hope that in any circumstances one can be humane.

In his autobiography Sakharov omitted one other event. In 1979, soon after Soviet troops entered Afghanistan, he wrote a letter to Leonid Brezhnev, the leader of the Soviet Union, in which he expressed his criticism of the war. This became one of the main reasons for his exile to the city of Gorky (now Nizhny Novgorod).

While living in Gorky, Sakharov went on hunger strikes three times (in 1981, 1984 and 1985). During those years he spent a total of 300 days in the hospital. In spite of almost complete isolation from the outside world, he continued his public activities in defense of human rights. During these years he wrote one of his main public works, *The Danger of Thermonuclear War*. Was there any greater danger to the world during the years of the Cold War?

Andrei Sakharov was able to return to Moscow only in December 1986, and in less than three years, in the first democratic elections he was elected a USSR deputy from the Academy of Sciences. "I am the people's deputy. This turned out to be my main course," he said. These were not empty words for Sakharov. By the end of November 1989, he had presented to the constitutional committee his own proposal for a new Constitution.

In any situation, Sakharov retained his dignity as a person and his feeling of responsibility as a citizen. More than once he had to stand up for his convictions, and he resisted pressure that few people would be able to overcome.

He was a true prophet. A prophet in the ancient, original meaning of this word, calling his people to moral renewal for the sake of the future.

— Dmitry Likhachev
20th century Russian scientist
on Andrei Sakharov

In the evening of December 14, 1989, after a busy day, Andrei Sakharov went to bed, telling his wife, “I am going to have some rest. Tomorrow will be a difficult day. There will be a fight at the Congress.” These turned out to be his last words. During the night he passed away.

We have touched upon the lives of four people — representatives of different epochs and different views. What unites them? It is only one thing — love, which guided them in all their actions. Love toward their country, love toward people, love toward the whole world.

Prayer of St. Francis

The following is a prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, a thirteenth century saint from Italy, who was well known for his love of nature and his life of simplicity and poverty.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I
may not so much seek

To be consoled, as to console,

To be understood, as to understand,

To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

It is in dying that we are born

into eternal life.

CHAPTER 42

The Process of Growth

When you were born, how much did you know? Were you able to walk or talk? Everything and everyone goes through a process of growth and development before reaching maturity or perfection. As the proverb says, “From acorns mighty oak trees grow.” And it is not just our bodies that grow and mature. Intellect, emotions, and character also grow.

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women, merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling, puking in the nurse's arms:
Then, the whining schoolboy with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like a snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like a furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then, a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like a pard,
Jealous in honor, sudden, and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth: and then, the justice,
In fair round belly, with good capon lin'd,
With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws, and modern instances,
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side,
His youthful hose well sav'd, a world too wide,
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble pipes,
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness, and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

— William Shakespeare
As You Like It

Although you already have been through many changes and have had many experiences, more changes and experiences await you in the future. There are different ways of looking at how people change and grow. Jacques, a rather cynical character in one of Shakespeare's plays, in a memorable passage to the left outlined his slightly mocking vision of the “seven ages of man.”

Of course, this is not the only way to view the process of human development, as we shall see. Yet we should have a sense of perspective on where we came from and where we are going. Too many people try to arrest the process, whether by cosmetic surgery or other means, instead of gracefully letting go and moving on.

In fact, we can say that all development goes through three main stages:

- ✕ Formation
- ✕ Growth
- ✕ Completion

Physical development

Physical growth and development happen naturally. We don't have to worry about stretching our skin and enlarging our organs as we grow taller. We don't have to train our stomach to digest food or take courses in breathing. We don't have to supervise and regulate our heart to make sure that it is pumping enough blood through our arteries.

Like everything in the natural world, our physical body reaches maturity through an automatic growth process governed by natural law. Still, we have to channel our physical energy constructively into sport, art, music or some other skill.



Around the world many people celebrate their twenty-first birthday as their passage into the adult world. Adulthood represents perfection, but is everyone mature by the time he turns 21? There is another aspect to growth — the perfection of one's character. Although the inner self also develops through stages, it is not automatic. As we know, there are many people who have an adult's body but continue to act very childishly.

Stages of inner growth

A number of psychologists have studied psychological growth and concluded that each of us passes through a series of progressive developmental stages.

For example, the American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg described the following levels of moral development:

- the **pre-moral** level of behavior, in which a person is motivated by biological and social impulses and has no sense of obligation to rules.
- the **conventional** level of behavior, in which an individual accepts with little critical reflection the standards of his group.
- the **autonomous** level of behavior, in which a person's conduct is guided by his own thoughts and he judges for himself whether something is good, not accepting the standards of his group without reflection.

There is an order and connection between the stages. Each of us must take responsibility to advance to a higher level of morality. The challenges of life and training at home and school may speed this process, but a person's will decides whether he cultivates a better way of thinking, feeling and acting. Let us look at the process of growth in more detail.

Experience shows us that the spirit does not grow in the same way that the body does: Spiritual growth requires conscious effort. For example, the intellect develops, but sometimes to make it do so we have to think "till it hurts." Learning to concentrate is not easy. We can describe three principal stages of spiritual development.

Formation stage

A newborn child is driven by a few basic needs and desires. Babies want to be nourished, to sleep peacefully, to excrete comfortably and to be held and loved. When any of these needs is not met adequately, babies communicate immediately through crying: "I'm hungry, I'm tired, I'm wet, I want to be held — and someone had better do something quickly!"

Mothers generally take center stage in fulfilling these needs of their babies. Through a relationship with a warm, responsive environment, the baby develops a confidence and an attitude of basic trust toward life. He knows that his mother loves him and will fulfill all his desires. He knows that even if she is absent for a while, she





will return. Soon he expresses his joy at seeing his mother with a smile and finds that this is rewarded with even more love and attention. If, on the other hand, these desires are not fulfilled consistently, or if the mother is absent, a person may grow up with a basic mistrust not only of his mother but also of people and life in general.

This initial stage of life is characterized by a receptivity to love. Infants and children are keenly aware of their own needs and desires. They have a very limited awareness of the needs of others. No one complains about their behavior,

telling them, “Oh, you’re so selfish.” This kind of self-absorption is natural in their growth process. If an older person acts like this, we tell him to “grow up and stop acting like a baby.”

Experiencing the joy of receiving love is an important prerequisite to achieving a mature heart that seeks to continually give love. Therefore, during this phase it is important to learn how to receive love and respond to it. Have you ever tried to do something nice for someone who was unable to accept it or respond to you? How did you feel when your kindness and concern were rejected?

Thus, the development of responsive love is an important step. Even as adults, it’s good to retain the spontaneous qualities of childhood, such as open-heartedness, trust in others, and responsiveness to love. It is this responsiveness that attracts us to the beauty of a child’s heart and love.

A critical developmental task for children is to master our most basic physical needs for the sake of others and ourselves. For example, toilet training is very important in one’s social development. A child learns to be patient — to tolerate hunger while waiting to be fed — and he learns self-control through toilet training. Self-control gives a feeling of pride and confidence, while a loss of self-control is accompanied by feelings of shame and doubt.

We learn to speak, feed ourselves, dress ourselves, and bathe ourselves. The more we can do for ourselves, the more independent and free we become. With this growing freedom comes responsibility and the sense that some actions and words are right or wrong. Our conscience is largely molded by the social and spiritual environment in which we grow up. During this stage we are quite dependent on others, not only in physical ways. Most of our thinking and emotional strength come from our parents as well.

Growth stage

The time of dependency and absorbing love gives way to a period of learning to share love. This occurs concurrently as we become more aware of others. Even an older baby sometimes has an impulse to share his food or give something away.

As a baby begins to learn how to live with, relate to, and love others, he or she also begins to learn the value of giving. Our giving at this stage, though, is limited and conditional. We tend to give as much as we are given. We give as long as we know that something will be returned. We are usually nice to someone as long as he is nice to us. We are learning about reciprocation, giving and receiving.



Our range of compassion has expanded. Children are more aware of people outside their immediate family. They also realize that other people have different feelings, desires, and ways of seeing the world.

Intimate interpersonal relationships become a central preoccupation. Adolescents want to be together, to do things together, to socialize, to reach out and communicate with one another. Early adolescence is a time of circles of friends, of important beginning steps away from the family to new social relationships.

Our goal is greater independence. We are virtually self-sufficient physically, and we want to be the same internally. Defining oneself — creating a sense of one's own identity — is the central issue during this phase. We may ask ourselves:

- ✕ Who am I?
- ✕ Where do I belong?
- ✕ What am I really like?
- ✕ Why am I the way I am?
- ✕ What or who shall I be?
- ✕ How can I grow and change?
- ✕ How am I developing?

We try to develop our own views of life, and we have opinions on everything. In this stage we are concerned with making moral and ethical sense of our world. We have to make difficult personal decisions of right and wrong. We are meant to receive this inner direction through our conscience (see Chapter 36).

During adolescence many dramatic changes occur in our physical bodies. We have to come to terms with our new appearance. Accompanying this are the awakening of our sexuality and relations with persons of the opposite gender. Our challenge at this time involves channeling our sexual energy into creative and productive activities, relationships, sports, work, or studies — until our character matures in integrity and unselfish love. We have already discussed how learning to live with and love others requires special knowledge, skills and training that can guide us to create peaceful, joyful and loving relationships, especially in our marriage and family.

This period also is characterized by a strong desire for self-esteem and self-respect. One way we gain this self-respect is through the control we have gained over our bodies. During this time adult intellectual capacities are being explored. We learn to appreciate the dignity of using our mind rather than being controlled by our instincts.

We are coming to gain control over our impatience, greed, anger, hatred, jealousy and other unruly emotions. Through these victories over ourselves, we pave the way for success in friendships and working with others. Particularly important, we prepare for a good marriage and family and for being productive in society.

Completion stage

Here we learn to give love unconditionally. This totally unselfish love, described by the Greeks as *agape*, has the quality of giving without expecting anything in return. Joy comes from the act of giving. The prompting of our heart and conscience to live for others fully guides us.

You may wonder if it is really possible to love like this. But we see this standard of love all of the time in parental love. While the child is primarily receiving, the parent is primarily giving. Even through the night, interrupting her sleep, a mother patiently gives to her child. Does the mother expect the child to give her a massage in the morning after a sleepless night? No, the mother expects nothing from the child. Still, she continues to give and give and give.

You don't have to be a parent to express this quality of love. A mature person expresses the heart of a parent in every relationship — giving without expecting to receive. Of course, everyone likes to receive love, but a mature person continues to give love even without receiving anything in return. If we use parental love as an ideal for relating to others, we will become more unconditional in our love and therefore freer.

As a small child, do you remember drawing pictures for your mother or father? From an objective viewpoint, the pictures probably looked terrible, but what if your parents had scoffed at your pictures? How would you have felt? You would have felt rejected and unmotivated to give more.

Because your parents could see the picture with eyes of love, they were probably moved by your effort. They could see the heart behind the giving. They probably exclaimed how beautiful your picture was. I'm sure that your parents displayed many of your masterpieces on the walls or refrigerator.

When a child sees the response of his parent, this stimulates his creativity and his desire to give more. He can't wait to draw another picture and another.

Loving unconditionally means that we don't focus on the faults and mistakes of others, but instead look for the beautiful and good things in them. This will encourage others to express more of their best nature.

Parents always enjoy watching their child learn how to walk. When the child falls down, they don't laugh at him. They don't become discouraged and tell the child that he is hopeless. They are proud of his first two steps, even though he may have fallen down 100 times in the process. Each time he falls, the parents are there to help

and encourage him to keep trying. How about ourselves? When we look at others, do we give up on them when we see them fail? Or do we help them, encourage them to try again and congratulate them on their successful steps?

People who love unconditionally are free to love any person at any time, and even to love their enemies. When we can love those who reject and hate us, or commit wrongful actions against us, then our heart is free. This is true freedom.

Mature love requires effort. It is not automatic. Loving is an art and requires training and discipline just as any other skill. Good doctors, musicians, artists, and athletes spend countless hours in training in order to perfect their abilities and talents. How much more difficult is it to become a person capable of true love?



How do we become loving persons? In the same way that we become physically fit: by challenging our physical limitations. If we stop running when we become tired, does our body become stronger? If we stop loving someone when a relationship becomes difficult, then we won't develop our ability to love. If we don't make an effort to love others, we will become isolated and lonely people.

A mature person values interdependence more than independence, because he recognizes the supreme importance and value of properly relating to other people and things.

Love cannot exist without freedom. Love cannot be forced, bought, or claimed. Without freedom, we would be nothing more than sophisticated robots, lacking any true potential for love and creativity. Therefore, in order for love to exist in our life, we must voluntarily participate in creating ourselves, choosing the way of true love and goodness. We are responsible for our own spiritual growth and maturity.

"Responsibility" may not be your favorite word, but when you begin to understand what it really means, then you can appreciate it more. Responsibility is more than duties, obligations and things that we "must" do. Responsibility means our ability to create something new or choose our response to what life brings us.

We are free and creative beings, and therefore we cannot blame other people or circumstances for who we are. Habitually thinking, "If only I had more money," "If I could just have more time," "If I had better parents," "If only the economy were better" means we are waiting for other people to change or for our luck to change. If we keep waiting for the solution to be found outside ourselves, then chances are nothing will change in our life.

A responsible person thinks, "I can be wiser," "I will be more loving," "I am able to be more resourceful," "I can be more patient." We alone determine our capacity to love. You are the one who decides what kind of person you are, what kind of friend you are, what kind of husband or wife you will be, and what kind of parent you will be — by your response to what you know is true and right.

Of course, sometimes we fail to live up to our principles and potential, settling for just getting by without causing too much trouble. We may find we violate our conscience every day. However, if we encourage ourselves and others to live by the principle of true love, then we gradually will mature in our ability to give to others. Our conscience will govern our body. We will achieve integrity over time.

Of course, we are free to take the path in life we choose. But what do wealth, power, freedom and education mean if we're not truly happy with ourselves and our relationships with others? If we *choose* to use our creativity, freedom, and responsibility for the sake of true love and goodness, then the doors will open to endless fulfillment and happiness.

For Your
Journal



Describe an experience through which you grew. Why did you grow and in what way?



To read

Jonathan Livingston Seagull, by Richard Bach

CHAPTER 43

My Purpose in Life

Sometimes you must have asked yourself, “What is the purpose of my life? Why am I here?” The philosopher Aristotle noticed that everything changes or grows so as to achieve some goal. For example, acorns always grow into oak trees and never into anything else. (Unless they are eaten by squirrels, in which case they won’t grow at all!) Similarly, children grow into adults. Everything has a purpose, an inner aim that guides its development. For example, a guitar is designed and made to produce beautiful music. When the guitar fulfills the purpose for which it was created, the guitar maker is happy and so, one might imagine, is the guitar. If, however, the guitar were used for knocking posts into the ground, it would be damaged and no longer would be able to fulfill its intended purpose. The maker would probably feel hurt and disappointed, and maybe angry.

How about people? Ultimately we can be happy only if we fulfill our true purpose in life, the purpose that is embedded in our human nature. If we try to set for ourselves a different purpose, even if we fulfill it we will not be happy. We will damage ourselves in some way. This is why some people go through identity crises. They are not sure about who they are or what they should become.

Money, power, knowledge or love?

What is the purpose of life? Let’s think about what motivates people. As we saw in the chapter on happiness, everyone wants to be happy. But how do people go about seeking for it? Some people think that they will be happy if they become rich, so they make it their life’s ambition and goal to make as much money as possible. But will money alone make us happy? There are many rich people who are very

unhappy. They are never quite sure whether people like them for themselves or because of their money. Others think

knowledge is most important, so they bury their head in books. Such people can become eccentric and

isolated and lose the ability to form close relationships. Still others think power is the way to happiness. They try to dominate others as a way of life. Such people are often deeply insecure and paranoid.

Some people long to be famous. But many famous people say they find life empty and meaningless; that they lost their way in life once they became famous.



If we look at the question more deeply, we may conclude that the most precious thing is love. No matter how wealthy, knowledgeable, powerful or famous you may be, unless you have someone with whom you can share your joy, your sorrow, your opinions, and your ideals, you are in truth poor.

But what or whom do we want to love? It is possible to love a stone, polish it, put it on display and admire it every day. But a stone does not respond. It is the same, day after day, whether you look at it or not. How about a plant? It is possible to have a deeper relationship with a plant because it is alive and resembles us more than a stone does. Plants respond, and it clearly matters to the plant that it is cared for. However, plants generally don't distinguish between people. They don't seem to care who waters them. Their level of response is definitely lower than that of an animal, with which one can have a deeper relationship. A well-trained dog is loyal and obedient and will even defend its master from attack. It is pleasant to take one's dog for walks, but can it appreciate the sunset? Does it understand your poetry?

Ultimately, each of us seeks a person with whom we can share our heart. Someone whom we can love and care for. Someone we can trust and to whom we can tell anything. Someone with whom we can be ourselves and who will never betray us. Someone who can understand us and to whom we may be able to entrust our life. Someone we want to be with all the time and whom we miss when we are away. Someone who is like us but about whom we are always discovering new things. Someone who can be a friend. And one day we will want someone whom we can

marry and with whom we can have a family. Such love is the source of the deepest joy and happiness. Love should be primary, because love is the source of life itself.

Along with love and life, we also want to have an ideal, something beyond ourselves for which to live, strive, and maybe even give our lives. When we have love, life and an ideal, everything seems possible and worthwhile. Without them life is empty and meaningless. Then people begin to look for other ways to fill the void, such as through drinking, sex, money, power or knowledge.



What is it that we want?

What do you really want in life? What do you want to achieve and accomplish? What kind of person do you want to become? We have asked these questions several times in this book, so perhaps now is the time to draw a few conclusions. In summary, we can say that each person wants to:

- ✕ grow up and become a person of mature character;
- ✕ marry and have a loving family;
- ✕ make a positive contribution to the society in which he lives through a chosen profession and career.

These are all creative acts. We usually think of creativity in terms of art, science, literature, and technology. These are important areas of creative activity, of course,

and they bring us tremendous fulfillment. Still, as important as they are, the greatest creative process, and the most subtle one, lies in the formation of your own self, your relations with others and your contribution to the society around you.

It is an astonishing fact that we create our own character. Our first goal is to fulfill our potential and become a person of mature character. Sadly, many people, for one reason or another, fail to do this. They give up when faced by challenges they think they cannot overcome or are not motivated to overcome. Instead of putting love and values at the center of their life, they allow negative emotions like greed, resentment or revenge to guide their decisions and actions.

Although we have the ability to create our own self, we cannot do this alone. In the chapter on relationships we talked about the two complementary purposes that everything and everyone has. Complete fulfillment cannot be attained in isolation. We are all born into a family. It is there that we are meant to discover our identity and develop our character. It is in the family that we learn how to form relationships, first with our parents, and then with brothers and sisters, grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. It is there that we learn to love and be loved, to forgive and be forgiven, to disagree and be reconciled, to give and receive. We learn how to behave and have good manners. In family life we learn how to make relationships and friendships. So, our second goal is to create good relationships in our family and with others. If in our relationships we are honest and unselfish, we will have many friends and be a good influence on those around us. On the other hand, if we are dishonest and selfish, we will have few friends and will corrupt those we meet.

Our third goal in life is to find a profession and career through which we express our creativity, support our family and contribute something of value to our community and society. We love to experience the beauty of nature. We also seek to utilize the material resources of our world to create and play musical instruments, to sculpt, to paint, to design, and to build things. Creating gives us joy, because it gives expression to our character and dreams. We also hope that what we create will please others. Nearly every artist looks forward to the day when he can hold an exhibition of his work and have it appreciated by others. People want to find fulfillment through their work, be it as a teacher, factory worker, farmer or businessman. They want to experience creating something that is good and is valued by others. In the end all of this is an expression of love.

Those who do not have love at the center of their life, but rather resentment, envy or hatred, enjoy destroying things rather than creating — committing acts of vandalism, for example. Because they do not love and respect the natural world, they pollute it and senselessly damage it. Such people, if they are in business, tend to be motivated solely by the desire for profit rather than the desire to produce high-quality goods.

These three fundamental life goals encompass the entire realm of human experience. They present us with a standard and model of moral excellence that we should all strive to fulfill. Attaining them involves practicing the principles of unselfishness and true love in all aspects of our life — within ourselves, in our relationships and with respect to our environment. Let us now explore further how we can achieve each of these life goals.

The first purpose of life — developing my character

Our first concern in life should be the development of our character. The key to this is achieving unity between our mind and body so that we can become a person whose words and deeds are one. As we grow, we must learn self-control. We should learn to control our appetites. We eat to live instead of living to eat. We also need to control our desire for sleep. In our teenage years controlling our sexual desires be-



comes a priority. If we do not learn to master our body's desires, they will corrupt our character. If we become people who are in the habit of following our body's desires, then we come to see every situation and every relationship from the point of view of what is good for me. At the same time, we become insensitive to the needs and interests of others. We end up using and exploiting others to gratify our own selfish desires.

In all great civilizations, education for character and the transmission of cultural virtues from one generation to the next always have been chief concerns. You can examine yourself and check which virtues and vices you have been developing until now. If you don't like what you see, it is not too late to change. You have the ability to create your own character and personality. According to the decisions you make, you are determining the kind of person you will become.

So, what kind of person *do* you want to become? By now we hope that you would want to become a person who is mature. Maturity is measured not by the ability to gain knowledge, power, or money, but by the quality of our heart and conscience. In other words, our ability to love others, arising out of our heart, and to do what is right, guided by our conscience, are the factors that fundamentally determine the level of our maturity.

What is a mature person like? Such a person accepts responsibility for his life and expresses this by earning his way in the world. In his heart he knows that he ought to contribute more to the world than he takes from it. This attitude leads to self-respect and happiness.

Self-respect leads to respect for others. A mature person does not feel humiliated when someone is rude to him or tries to embarrass him, because he knows and respects himself. His sense of dignity and integrity allow him to not respond to rude people on their level. If he is mistreated at work, he will not take it out on his family. If his boss is unfair to him, he will not take it out on those under him. In other words, the way he behaves is not determined by the way he is treated. Rather, he is consistently loving, respectful and conscientious.

The second purpose of life — building loving relationships in my family

All of us were born into a family, and it is the family that largely determines what we will become. Throughout this book we have spoken about the importance of our relationships. The most fundamental relationship in our life, especially in our early years, is the one we have with our parents. The nature of that relationship impacts us in many ways.

Furthermore, our family relationships become the models for all our other relationships. A person who does not have a good relationship with his father probably

will have difficulties with other people in positions of authority later in life. Someone who hates his mother probably will find it difficult to have close relationships with women. A person who is jealous of a brother or sister probably will feel that way toward his peers.

Growing up in a happy and stable family remains a source of joy and security throughout life. An unhappy family environment is a source of pain and insecurity. A happy family background provides a hopeful context for fashioning our own dreams of future family happiness, while unhappy family experiences discourage us from believing that we can find real happiness in our own future family.

It may seem premature to think about marriage at this stage of your life, but if you can see the relatedness between the first and second life goals, you will appreciate the importance of discussing this topic even now. Your present stage of life is already a time of training to prepare you for marriage. Think about it. If you want to become a doctor, you will have to study for many years before you will be allowed to practice. If you want to drive a car, you will need to study the rules, practice driving and then pass a test before you earn a license. In every area of human endeavor it is the same. In order to have certain privileges, you first must demonstrate competence in that activity.

The same is true for marriage and family life. Yet often it happens that people marry and have children with very little preparation. Many people give more thought to their wedding ceremony than to how they will live together in the years that follow. Just like a profession, marriage and parenthood require special skills, knowledge and training. Learning to communicate, create harmony, balance priorities, and relate with in-laws are all important to the success of a marriage and family.

Sadly, many people enter into family life ignorant about love and relationships. Without such knowledge, these people live in hatred, fear, guilt, loneliness, and pain — thereby hurting their marriage partner. Some people go from one marriage to another because they never learn the requirements for a truly loving, committed and long-lasting relationship.



You can see that becoming a person of maturity who is capable of loving has everything to do with your future marital and family success.

A man and woman joining their lives together are like two universes merging into one. A new creation is formed — a marriage. Only when people come to possess unselfish love can they love another person completely. Husbands and wives first must have a sense of their own value in order to affirm and appreciate each other's unique value.

People possessing mature love anchor their marriage in loyalty, trust, commitment, and mutual fulfillment.

They don't need to look elsewhere for love, because they completely give of themselves for their spouse's total happiness. Would there be divorces in such marriages? Why would anyone want to divorce himself from such perfect happiness?

The love between husband and wife is the greatest gift any parents can give their child. A child created and born from true love and raised in an environment of unconditional love is loved for who he is — not because he is smart, beautiful or

talented but because of his own unique value. When a person feels his value, he is able to value and love others.

The joy and love that we experience in our own family would naturally be extended to other families in our community and ultimately to the whole human family. In such a world all people would feel connected in heart, transcending nationality, race and language. In such a world can you imagine war, starvation, and crime?

The third purpose of life — taking care of and contributing to my world

From the earliest age we are taught to care for the things around us, to not break them, and to not touch things that don't belong to us without first getting permission. We learn to look after our toys and possessions and learn how to keep them neat and tidy.

We also develop our creativity, playing with clay, painting, drawing and building things with bricks. Sometimes we give up in frustration when our creations don't look the way we want them to look. But as we practice, our skills develop and eventually we master the art. What we create is in many ways an expression of our character. That is why we can learn much about a person by looking at his paintings or reading his poetry. So while it is important to develop our skills, it is not something separate from our character development

Do you have a sense of wonder about the world in which we live? Are you curious about how it works and from where it came? Do you appreciate the extraordinary beauty of nature? We study science at school so as to understand the world more deeply. By using our reason and creativity, we can relate to the entire universe. With microscopes we observe tiny one-celled organisms, while with telescopes we observe galactic systems. Through our knowledge and skills we help to create and shape our environment.

Unfortunately, because of human immaturity and selfishness, the beautiful world that we inhabit often has been abused and polluted. And not just by industry. How often have we ourselves thrown something on the ground carelessly; how often have we broken bottles, damaged trees or vandalized something in some way?

Some people judge others, and themselves, by what they possess. Their value and their happiness depend on what they own. However, it may be more accurate to say that they are owned by their possessions! Many people flaunt their wealth to boost their own lack of self-esteem. They may think that a large book collection means that

they know a lot, or at least that it gives others that impression. They may even end up valuing things more than people, crowding their homes with things until there is no room left for people.

While it is important to respect things, people should dominate them and not vice versa. Healthy dominion over things is based on love and truth. Proper love and respect for the natural world is based on understanding, which is why scientists are often filled with a deep sense of wonder as a result of their studies.



When each person realizes his potential — spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and physically — it will be possible to create a rich culture and a comfortable living environment for all people. Through our chosen profession and career, motivated by our heart and conscience, we should use our knowledge and skills to enhance our society and the environment, improving the quality of life for all.

Conclusion

Deep down everyone has a strong desire to find fulfillment through these three life goals. This is because we were designed this way. Without ever being instructed about these things by our parents or teachers, we already have these desires within us. We intuitively sense that attaining these goals is necessary for us to experience true and complete happiness.

Life's purpose is to experience joy through true love in every relationship: within ourselves, with others, and with our environment. By discovering our own integrity as individuals, we can have harmonious relations with others. We can create happy families and make a positive contribution to our society and environment.

For Your
Journal



Reflect on and write in your journal the ways in which you are seeking to fulfill the 3 purposes of life as described in this lesson. How have you been doing so far? How do you foresee yourself fulfilling these purposes in the future? Are you strong in some of these and weak in others? Where do you feel you need to make more effort?

CHAPTER 44

The Way to Unification

If we look at the world around us, we see that it is full of conflict, intolerance and alienation. Why? Why don't people and nations live in peace? How do wars break out? Why does crime exist? What is the origin of violence in families? Why is unification still an unattainable ideal?

The problems that humanity faces seem so great and various that it is almost senseless to look for something in common between them. But as soon as we reflect on a deeper level, it turns out that all problems have one and the same source:

People cannot find unity or harmony within themselves. The inner conflict that

begins in the individual is reflected in relationships with other people, especially in families. People who do not have inner harmony and loving unity in their families cannot fully realize themselves nor the loving and creative potential within their relationships. Families are composed of individuals, and therefore the disunity within each member of a family creates disunity within the whole unit. The disunity at the family level leads to a contentious and dysfunctional society.

Many people and

organizations have tried to bring peace to the world. Still, we all understand that we are far from this goal. Often politicians who are responsible for the fate of their countries work with the conviction that everybody's well-being can be achieved by issuing better laws regulating relationships within society, or by organizing the economics and politics of the state in a more elaborate way. Lasting harmony has never been achieved this way and remains elusive to the human family.

In all of our efforts to solve problems among people, could it be that we fail to understand that the source of the problems lies somewhere deeper? Maybe we can compare problem-solving to the efforts of a gardener tending his garden. Imagine that every week he cuts all the new weeds but then is surprised when the weeds grow



back thicker and thicker. The weeds must be pulled out by the roots. Likewise, the problems of the world can be solved only by reaching their root, the disharmony in the hearts of individuals.

Before speaking of harmony and unity on the world level, it is necessary to overcome the conflict in one's own soul. For the world consists of us — separate human beings living together.

The search for inner harmony

Our way to unification — that is, peace on a worldwide level — starts with achieving unity in ourselves. As we become people of internal integrity and our actions follow the direction of an educated conscience, we become people with dignity, worthy of self-respect and the respect of others. Our century has seen many bloody revolutions, bringing great pain and death, but the only thing that can really bring about positive change is a change of heart. Racism, intolerance, wars, poverty, and all forms of social evil begin within the human heart. That is why we first must find the way to replace hate with love in our own souls. Then and only then can our world become a better place.

How can one achieve such unity? It is one thing to understand intellectually that the only real change in the situation of the world can be made through the growth of goodness within each individual, but it is another to actually reach into one's life and begin to reconstruct oneself as a true person. This task takes wisdom and determination.

Inner peace begins with the unity between a person's mind and body. What does this mean? The mind and body can be said to be united when the body is controlled by the higher mind of the individual. The higher mind is otherwise known as the conscience — that little voice that lives within you and guides you toward goodness. Following this voice sometimes can be easy and sometimes can be exceedingly difficult. Sometimes it is the simple things that are the origin of disunity between mind and body.

Imagine all of the human happiness that goes unfulfilled because of simple mind-body disunity. How many people ever realize their potential? How many people go beyond the drives of everyday life to become what they dream of? And how can a person's dreams become reality?

The foundation of realizing all dreams is harmony between the mind and body. Once an individual achieves this, he can become a leader of his community. Many such people will make up a solid society — people whose conscience is the director of their actions.

In discussing human nature, we have stated that every human being has two purposes. The first is directed at supporting personal life, the development of personality and individual character. The second purpose is connected with relationships: serving and caring for other people. The way to unification starts with



achieving harmony between these two purposes. Naturally, through our efforts and service to others we develop character traits in the direction of goodness. When we help other people, living for the sake of family, country, and all humanity, at the same time we will be able to express ourselves and bring to life the unique inner potential we possess. The only path leading toward this harmony is through moral and spiritual cultivation. Virtues such as honesty, conscientiousness, goodness, and love will naturally develop and enhance our inner world, ultimately defining us.

Unity of mind and body can be based only on the absolute standard of goodness — true love. True love is directed only toward the benefit of others. To determine if love is true, one may ask if it is eternal, unchangeable, and unconditional. In order for unification to materialize, love is necessary. No law or correct political plan will cause the world to change into a place of peace. Only love blossoming within the individual will bring peace on a worldwide level.

Gradually realizing the miracle of true love, making it part of our life and the basis of our relationships, we can arrive at genuine harmony in our soul. We will get to know the feelings of joy and satisfaction, the realization of the value and importance of our life, and the ability to solve complicated life situations with greater wisdom, integrity and responsibility. Ultimately we can be role models for others to follow in the development of world peace.

The family is the basis for unity in the world

No one can exist in absolute solitude; we need communication with other people. As children we start to understand the world that surrounds us through our families — first through our parents, then through our brothers and sisters. All our adult relationships reflect our experiences within our family. That is why the role of the family in the world is so important. It is in the family that each of us learns love or hatred, respect or intolerance, honesty or lies.

In order for the family to become the center of love and unity, those who marry should be mature, having achieved the foundation of inner harmony that we have spoken about. A family reflects each spouse's character strengths and weaknesses. If one partner is egocentric and focuses on the satisfaction of his or her own needs,

conflicts will be unavoidable and children will inherit that way of life.

If a husband and wife both have achieved inner unity and live for the sake of others, their family will live according to a principle that is different from those of most families. If husband, wife and children live unselfishly, seeking the welfare not only of their own family and relatives but also of other families, then the ideal of unity will be realized in their family. For what is unity in relationships? It is the ability to find a harmonious balance between one's own needs and the needs of others; it is caring for one



another, supporting and helping. Learning these traditions from their parents, children can grow their heart to love and respect all people. Thus the family will become the center of harmony, the center of unification for other people and for society.

It is no secret that many people marry only as a convenient way to satisfy their needs. Such egocentric families will not improve society. But families based on the

principle of eternal love will not be locked into the little world of their own problems; they will be open to other people, sharing their pain, worries and difficulties.

This is the way to achieve peace among people. Unity of mind and body within the individual will create families bringing love to the world. If the families making up society are focused on helping their neighbors and take responsible actions to solve the problems in their neighborhood or region, then problems in society will be reduced. In a harmonious, loving family, children naturally learn to respect their elders, to accept wise authority and to take responsibility for their own actions. Such people will help bring order to society based not on force or fear but on the natural understanding of basic principles of human social life. The inner regulating force of such a society will be love, not fear.

When relating to other countries, a nation formed of such families will also be guided by principles of mutual respect and the welfare of the whole. A mature person cannot put his own egoistic interests above everything taking place in the world, and a harmonious family will not build its prosperity at the cost of other families and the state. In the same way, to achieve real unity in the world, governments must seek not only their nation's welfare but also the welfare of other nations.

Thus we can conclude that the way to the unification of the whole world starts with the inner harmony of a person, and is reflected in succession on the levels of family, society and nation. The realization of this eternal dream of humanity is possible only on the basis of service, in which human action is always directed toward the benefit of others and not centered solely on the needs and benefits of one individual, family, society or nation. When nations pursue an other-centered perspective, a peaceful planet and human family will ultimately emerge.

People who have discovered a relationship with the higher power known by various faiths as God, Allah, or Yahweh will say that the source of love is the eternal Creator of our world. Most religious traditions teach that it is in relationship with Him that a person is able to develop his own higher self and prosper through difficulties, that He is the root of all goodness and the original source of love.

Unity and uniformity

Unification may be understood in different ways. Some people think that unity comes about by everyone believing the same creed or obeying the same authority, or belonging to the same organization, like cogs in a vast machine directed toward a common purpose. Yet if we think about it a bit more deeply and reflect on our own experiences, we can discover what the basis of unity has to be.

Sometimes people associate the idea of unity with uniformity or the loss of individuality. Wouldn't the world be boring if everyone believed the same thing and there were no longer national differences? There indeed should be unity in diversity. In fact, there has to be diversity. Unity can be achieved only by the harmony of different elements. Unification doesn't mean making everything the same. Unity is possible only on the basis of respect for the uniqueness of each individual. For instance, unity in a family does not mean that the spouses should resemble each other in everything, or that children should be copies of their parents. On the contrary, the more different the personalities of the children are, the richer the family is.

What can hold together people who are very different? The answer is simple: It is only love that allows people to maintain their uniqueness. Love first of all means respecting people's individuality and valuing it. It is senseless (and moreover, immoral) to try to destroy this unique beauty. A happy family is enriched by all the different personalities within it. In a similar way a peaceful world does not require a uniform culture but simply respects each nation's culture and allows each to make its

unique contribution to the rich tapestry of humanity. Individual characteristics can form a beautiful and integrated mosaic, the real meaning of which can be understood only when it is finished.

Let us now address the issue that causes the most doubt and contradictions. We have discussed different religious teachings, trying first of all to show what they have in common and the virtues that they all teach. Each religion also has unique insights, and it is impossible to reconcile different religions on the basis of logic. Each makes its own contribution to human understanding and culture, and the world would be a less interesting place without these differences. Unity among religions and nations cannot come about on the basis of trying to impose a uniform belief system, a uniform political system, uniform customs and laws, or uniform traditions and artistic forms. Only love, based on mutual respect, is able to transcend the differences and bring about unity of heart. Just as children in a family are united by the love of their parents, so too can parental love bring peace to the nations. The ideal resembles the Russian concept of *sobornost*, according to which everybody retains his own freedom and uniqueness. It is not that all people should be alike, but that they should learn to see the beauty of other traditions, while respecting and keeping their own.

The various religions and nations can be compared to different petals of a flower or the different fingers of a hand. Is there any sense in discussing which finger is better, the second or the fifth? Each of them is important and has its role, which cannot be performed by another. It would be absurd to try to make all fingers the same. How would you eat or write if you had a hand of thumbs? Such strange ideas don't occur to people when it concerns the parts of the body, for unity exists there already. However, people living in different countries or having different views (religious, political, or cultural) sometimes try to oppose this obvious principle. Thus wars and conflicts start with the desire to prove that one country, religion, race or party is more important and true than others, and that all the others should submit and change.

There is the light of truth, and there are people who approach it from different sides which are as many as there are radii in a circle; that is, the ways are really countless. Let us try to reach the light of truth, uniting everybody, and it is not for us to decide, how close to it and united we are.

— Leo Tolstoy
Way of Life

But even if this kind of unity is achieved, it doesn't last too long and needs to be supported by force. After some time has passed, such an unstable unity tends to deteriorate. It is impossible to make another person become exactly like yourself, impossible to turn a whole nation into robots that will look and act alike. Real unity is found not in uniformity, but in respectful relationships that support the harmonious complement of different traditions, teachings and national features.

Tolstoy is not addressing the type of unity that may be seen as profitable by some and costly by others. For example, Adolf Hitler attempted to unite Europe by imposing the same political system on all the nations and eliminating minorities that would not conform. Of course, this cannot be seen as an example of real unity.

Patriotism and unification of nations

In speaking of the unity of different nations, we come inevitably to the issue of patriotism. What does patriotism mean?

A true patriot loves his country, respects the people who live in it, has a familiarity and affection for its customs and national traditions, and is dedicated to its service. Authentic patriotism means putting the needs of one's country before one's own. This doesn't mean that we need to defend everything about our country, such as a government policy that is immoral or outdated. Patriotism is directed toward

goodness and the well-being of the country, and that cannot be achieved by immoral means. Andrei Sakharov cannot be accused of lacking patriotism, since it was love for his country that pushed him to criticize its violation of human rights and to speak in defense of its political prisoners. It is partly due to his efforts that democratic changes started in Russia.

In this connection we can't avoid another issue: How can love for humanity, and the search for peace for all people and countries, be justified when one's own country is in chaos, when people are losing respect and love for their own history and culture? In such a situation, is it too early to speak of love for humanity? Must patriotic feelings be revived first, so that everyone begins by feeling himself a citizen of his own country?

These two ideas are connected. True love for one's people, one's own country, is impossible without love and respect for other nations. Respecting, understanding, and taking responsibility for the fate of our country helps us to see the value of other nations. This is the essence of patriotism — remaining connected and at peace with other nations. Patriotism does not mean isolationism, fulfilling one country's needs at the expense of others. Our world is too small, and all countries are too closely connected to each other, for us to afford to love only our own nation and forget about the fate of humanity. In this connection, one cannot but remember the words of the Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev from his book *On Christian Unity*:

The idea of nation is not what it thinks of itself in time, but what God thinks of it in eternity. ... We must consider humanity as a whole, as a great compound being or social organism, the living members of which are represented by different nations. From this point of view it is obvious that no nation can live in itself and for itself, but the life of each nation presents only a certain part of the common life of humanity. The organic function of this or that nation in this world life is its real national idea, stated eternally in the plan of God.

We must know and love our own nation. But if we want to live in a world without wars and religious and racial intolerance, loving our own country is not enough. We must learn to value, respect and love other nations too.

This is the true way to unification. Each person must begin with cultivating unity within himself. This inner harmony becomes the source of unity in society, and societies based on love will bring the light of unity into relationships among all nations. Only then will our world, retaining the variety of colors and all the richness of cultural, historic and religious traditions, become a world of unity and love.



CHAPTER 45

Choose Your Destiny

Directions

Do not read these stories straight through! You will be asked to make choices as you read, and your selections will determine the outcome. After you make your choice, follow the directions and see what happens next!



The lucky lottery

You and your friend are walking together when you come upon a kiosk selling lottery tickets. They cost 10 rubles, and the grand prize is 1 million rubles!

You have 15 rubles, so you decide to buy one. Your friend also wants to buy a ticket but has only 5 rubles.

What do you do?

If you buy your ticket and keep your 5 rubles so that you will have some money left, go to (5)

If you tell your friend you will give him your 5 rubles so that he can purchase a ticket also, go to (2)

The prophet

You are a well-to-do businessman with a loving wife. Your life is easy and enjoyable, although you worry sometimes about the corruption you see in the society around you. Your hometown seems especially bad, but you feel there is little you can do about it.

You are at your country dacha with your family. As you are taking a nap, a "voice" wakes you. You look around but can see no one, yet you still hear the "voice." It claims to be an angel! You fear that you may be losing your mind.

What do you do?

If you tell your wife about hearing a "voice" and ask her advice, go to (9).

If you keep quiet about hearing a spiritual "voice" because you don't want other people to think you are crazy, go to (1).



If you decide to tell everyone that spirits speak to you, and that you are a special person who should be listened to, then go to (15)



The failed civil servant

You are a skilled and learned civil servant. You love reading the old classics and practicing those traditions and virtues of the past that have stood the test of time. They proved their usefulness time and time again as the proper way to solve sticky social problems.

You believe truthfulness and trustworthiness are the essential, though often neglected, virtues of good government and fruitful societal relations. The ideal of a good family is, you think, central to establishing the correct foundation for stability in the nation. The enduring benevolence of parents toward their children, and children's love and dutifulness toward their parents, are what separate humans from animals. You feel that expanding parental benevolence and filial piety into all

areas of society would create the path to stability for your country and the cornerstone for good government.

All around you are grasping civil "servants" who oppress those they should serve, while insincerely currying the favors of their superiors. Everywhere people care more about money and power than they do for each other. Your nation is falling apart from greed, loss of tradition and the failure to practice the social virtues.

What do you do?

If you continue at your government job as before, knowing that there is little one person can do, go to (21).

If you give in to the times and decide to look after your own welfare first, go to (6).

If you speak out against what is wrong in the government and try to set an example of courageous and honest practice in your own work, go to (10).



The party

You are a 16-year-old boy. Your parents and younger sister are traveling out of town to visit some friends for a week during the summer. You beg your parents to allow you to stay at home for the week and watch the flat. At first they refuse. But after discovering that your two other neighbors are also going away and will be unable to take care of your dog and water your family's plants, your parents agree to let you stay alone in the flat — under two conditions. First, you absolutely cannot have anyone over to the flat except for your best friend, Mike, whom your parents trust greatly. Second, you must be home before ten in the evening (and you know your father will call almost every night to make sure you're all right).

You argue with your parents sometimes and at times they annoy you, but you are happy that they trust you so much and you want to prove to them that you are mature. Your mother keeps the flat as clean as a museum. Your parents do not smoke and hate the smell of ciga-

rettes, and they rarely drink, although your father does have a liquor cabinet for guests.

Only one day after your family's departure, your best friend, Mike, tries to talk you into having a "small" party. All your friends know that your parents are away and that you have the whole flat to yourself. You did not want any of your friends to know, because you knew they would all want to come over. You are a little angry at Mike for telling anyone after he said he would not. But he just laughs and tells you you'll have a heart attack by the time you're 25 if you don't stop taking everything so seriously.

For the first few days you ignore the requests to have a party, but everyone is calling you to ask when it will be. You realize that if you don't invite at least some of your friends over, they will cut you out of the group and call you a goody-goody.

What do you do?

If you decide to have the party under the condition that only five people will come and that they won't drink or smoke in the flat, go to (11).

If you decide not to have the party at all, go to (20).

1 The "voice" you heard troubles you less and less. You are able to continue your life normally, but you always wonder what might have happened. The End.

2 You say to your friend, "Take my extra 5 rubles and buy a ticket for yourself. You might be lucky."

Later you find that your ticket is a loser but your friend's ticket won the million rubles!! When you see him again he says to you, "If you have change for 50, I'll pay back the 5 you gave me yesterday."

What do you do?

If you shout insults at him and walk away in a huff, go to (23).

If, to express your anger at his ingratitude, you hit him, go to (8) .

If you congratulate him on his good fortune and sincerely say, "The 5 rubles were a gift. Keep it," giving your friend a friendly pat on the back, go to (13) .

3 You find only a handful of young men who want to learn from you. What do you do?

If you give up, go to (21).

If you continue to teach whomever will listen, go to (19).

4 As you try to share your message with the people of your city, you are mocked and persecuted. People call you crazy and anti-social or else doubt your sincerity.

What do you do?

If you give up trying to influence society with your message and only continue to share with those, such as your wife, who support and believe in you, go to (7).

If you continue despite ridicule and persecution, go to (16).

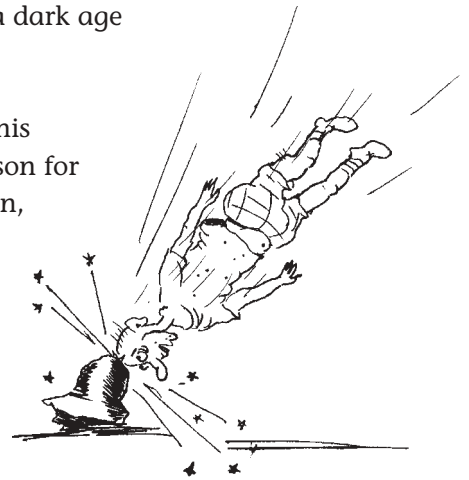
5 Your ticket loses. Your friend is upset by your stinginess in not lending him money so that he could buy a ticket as well. In the months ahead the two of you grow steadily apart. Years later you pass each other on the street without recognizing each other. The End



6 By giving in to the system, you lose your self-respect and use your knowledge, skill and position to benefit yourself. Eventually you are betrayed and exposed by jealous fellow workers. Money, position, power, and self-esteem are all lost, and you become a miserable beggar. The End.

7 Your small group is considered a silly cult gathering and is not paid much attention. After your death your few followers break up and the messages from the angelic “voice” have no influence on society. People continue to become more hedonistic, self-centered and corrupt. This eventually leads to the breakdown of civilization followed by a dark age lasting centuries. The End.

8 Your friend falls from your blow and strikes his head on a stone. He dies. You are sent to prison for manslaughter. When you are released from prison, your old acquaintances shun you as a murderer. You wander about from place to place, always feeling marked as a killer. The End.



9 Your wife calms your fears and says that she loves and trusts you. She suggests that you write your messages down so that the two of you can review them together. Go to (18).

10 Your outspokenness earns you nothing but trouble, and your practice of honest government puts your colleagues in a bad light so that they conspire against you. Eventually you are driven from the government.
What do you do?

If you decide to become a teacher and try to teach junior civil servants the way of good government and productive social relations, in the hope that it might do some good, go to (3).

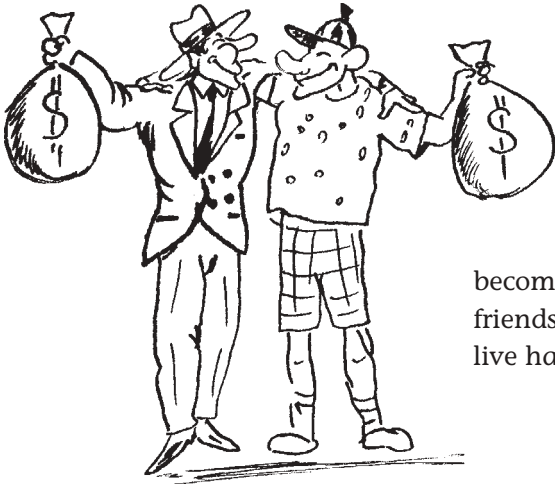
If you throw up your hands in disgust with all the corruption, go to (21).

11 Nine o'clock comes and the doorbell rings. To your surprise and dismay, ten friends, including a girl from school whom you really like, are at the door. They have alcohol with them. You are standing at the door.
What do you do?

If you let them in, go to (17).

If you tell them that they cannot come in because there are too many of them and you had already said that no drinking would be allowed, go to (20).

12 Because of the rejection you experience from the people of your city and the misunderstanding of your wife and relatives, you become a recluse. Your marriage and business deteriorate and you come to live all alone with your “voices.” People call you the “crazy hermit.” The End.

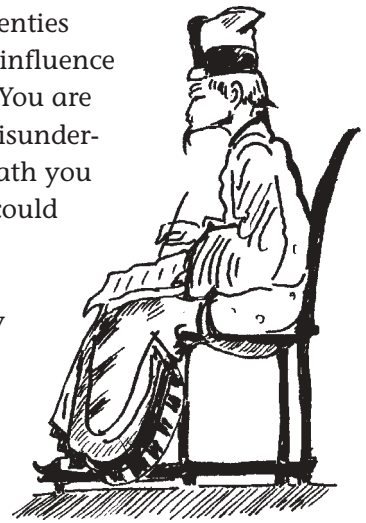


13 He is moved by your friendly and generous nature. Your friend weeps and says to you, “Half the prize money is yours. Please forgive me for being so stingy.” You insist on your pleasure at his good fortune and say that he does not owe you anything but friendship. Your friend insists on sharing the winnings. The two of you become business partners investing together, and both of you become wealthy. Your greatest wealth, however, is your undying friendship. As you go through life, you continue to share together and live happy and productive lives. The End.

14 You live well into your seventies without gaining any real influence in your sadly deteriorating country. You are often disappointed with your students, who frequently misunderstand what you try to teach them. At the time of your death you believe yourself to be a failure, but you know you never could have sacrificed your principles or abandoned your path without everlasting regret.

After your death your disciples and others inspired by your example and teaching continue your work. Eventually the ruler of a new government adopts your path as the basis for a revival of society. Everyone in your country comes to be influenced by your teaching, and a rebirth of your nation takes place.

Your teaching of the right path of societal relations and responsibilities inspires your nation and the surrounding countries for 25 centuries. Your philosophy endures today. You are Master Kung, Confucius, the Great Teacher and the father of Far Eastern civilization! The End.



15 People laugh at your outbursts, and your wife and friends worry about your sanity.
What do you do?

If you continue, go to (22).

If you stop trying to share your message with these ungrateful people, go to (12).

16 Persecution continues, but you gain followers. Finally you are driven from your city as a troublemaker. You go to a new town, where finally you are well received. After some years you are able to return to your own city. There you do away with the corruption and set about reforming the society. Your message of honesty, charity, faithfulness to the will of God and honest dealing among people spreads throughout the country. After your death it continues to spread and becomes the basis for a great civilization. Because of the order and goodness your teaching brings to society, the arts, literature and science flourish.

Your civilization preserves and expands the knowledge of past neighboring societies. This comes to influence European society, which has passed through a long “dark age.” The learning and elegance of the civilization founded on the message from your “voice” are the most important catalyst in the European Renaissance and later the Scientific Revolution.

Your message is read and practiced from Africa to Indonesia and beyond by hundreds of millions of followers who call you the Prophet. Many historians consider you the most influential person in history. Your name is Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets. The End.

17 At first you run from room to room, picking up empty beer bottles and cigarette butts, and nagging your friends to keep the music down. After about an hour you tire of being a watchdog and decide to join the fun. A few of your friends (including that pretty girl) are playing a drinking game in the kitchen. Mike asks you to join in, and so you do. After you have six or seven beers and a few cigarettes, you get up the courage up to ask that girl to dance. It turns out that she wants to do a lot more than dance. You know you really don’t want to go into the bedroom with this girl. You don’t know anything about her but her name. But you’re really drunk by now and your friends keep urging you on.

You wake up the next afternoon alone in the flat. Looking around, you can’t believe it’s the same place you live in! There are beer cans and bottles and cigarette butts all over. Fortunately, you find nothing broken, and manage to clean everything up before your parents return home, so they never know. All of your friends are happy and think you’re “really cool” to have had such a great party. You think it’s all over until, two months later, the girl you were with tells you she is pregnant and it’s definitely your doing. The End.



18 The messages from your “voice” decry the degradation of society, the hypocrisy and superstition that are the present practice of religion, and the callous, selfish and money-grabbing attitudes that permeate your city. The “voice” calls for submission to God’s will and righteous dealing among people. This message seems good, noble and true to your wife and the small circle of friends with whom you have shared it.

What do you do?

If you now share your message with the people of your city, go to (4).

If you decide to keep the message to the small circle of friends who have come to believe in it, go to (7).

19 Your students remain very few in number. The very best one, the one who really understands you, dies. This leaves you distraught.



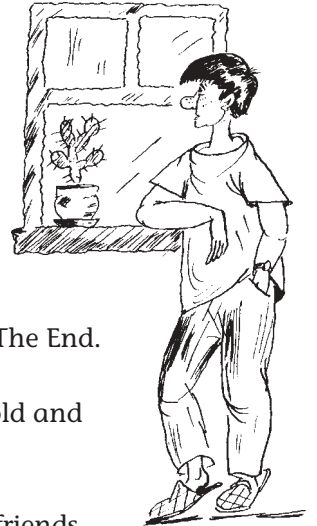
In time, however, word of your wisdom spreads as you wander about teaching the path to those who will listen. A local political leader offers you a post in his government if you will stop being so idealistic and inflexible.

What do you do?

If you compromise your principles so that you can try to influence the “system” from within, go to (6).

If you refuse the government post and continue to teach your few disciples and whomever else will listen, go to (14).

20 Your friend Mike is disgusted with you, and your other friends don’t want to talk to you anymore. You feel bad, but you think you did the right thing. You knew you couldn’t lie to your parents, because they trusted you. You didn’t believe that your friends could have a small get-together without drinking and smoking. You’re lonely for a while, but then you start to think about the way your former friends treated you and the way they treat each other. Besides, who knows what could have happened if you had let them have a party in your flat? The End.



21 Life goes on, things go from bad to worse, you grow old and embittered and die. The End.

22 Everyone continues to mock you. Your relatives and friends finally have you committed to an asylum for the mentally unbalanced. Surrounded by other madmen, you continue to rant about your “voices.” The doctors jokingly refer to you as the “prophet.” The End.

23 Your former friend uses his money well and becomes wealthy. You are consumed with resentment as you hear of his success. Your days are always hard and unlucky. You live a lonely and bitter life as you continue to curse your former friend. The End.

CHAPTER 46

The Challenge of Life

Life changes as an individual passes from childhood through youth and middle age into old age. Not only in human life is this true, but also in nature. We see four seasons coming one right after the other. If you were to insist on living always in summer and never prepared for winter, you would have a problem when winter arrived. In the winter those who don't get ready for spring and confine themselves in snug, warm rooms will be uncomfortable as the season changes. Do you insist on wearing winter clothes when summer comes? No, you need to change your clothes to suit the season.

This is exactly how it happens in our life. Those who belong to the summer of life — the prime of youth — want to have eternal youth. But that is not possible. It's natural that there must be change. In a world of constant change it's good to learn to accept every event in a positive way, so that you can continually grow.

What are we looking for?

All of us are constantly seeking happiness. The happiness we would like to have would include every aspect of life. A person who is happy in the broadest sense is likely to be thinking about the whole world. This is the nature of human beings.

Although we know what humankind is seeking, we don't see it anywhere around us. Such happiness is apparently something that humankind has lost. We are not daydreaming. It is not the concept of happiness we are seeking but the reality of happiness.

Some people think that money can bring happiness. Money is indeed important and powerful. However, those who have great wealth tend to protect and isolate themselves. Certainly money does not seem to be the sure way to bring happiness.

The next thing we consider is knowledge. You may think a university education will help you in your search for happiness. But we see that knowledge alone is also inadequate as a tool to achieve lasting happiness. If you take knowledge seriously, it becomes very narrow and specialized. So happiness doesn't seem to be found in knowledge either.

How about power? Everyone thinks he would like to be powerful. Can power produce happiness? If you have power, do you want to share it with others? No, you want to keep it to yourself.

Therefore we can conclude that although money, knowledge, and power may help people in their search for happiness, none of these is itself the essential path to happiness.

Is there any way to reach happiness?

Have you experienced how difficult it is to make another person do your will? An elder brother, for example, will rarely if ever listen to his younger sister. Even in a small family there are walls. How can we bring them down? Can you force your way

into another person's mind or heart? Or because you are so smart, can you bring down the walls through flattery? It might work at first, but once they find out they've been deceived, the walls will be higher than before. That is human nature.

All sorts of walls between people exist in the world today. What could possibly penetrate those walls or bring them down? In our world there is only one hope to eliminate these barriers. That is love. If we become truly loving people, there is no place we cannot go. Only true love belongs everywhere.

You can love yourself when your mind and body are in harmony with each other. If you love yourself when your desire and actions are going in different directions, then your love has little meaning. When your mind and body are united into one, then your love will be eternally protected by God. Unity is the beginning point of love, the point where love can come to abide.

When your mind and body are in perfect oneness, you can even hear your mind singing and you feel light, as if you are flying or dancing. When you look at the world, it is so much more beautiful. It's as if you have eyeglasses of unity, and you are looking at things through God's eyes. Through those eyeglasses everything in the world is beautiful.

Love starts within the individual, and then is expanded to the family, society, nation, and finally — to the whole cosmos. And this is the way to bring harmony and happiness to the world.

The way of love

Love means giving. In giving we must not be narrow-minded; we will not draw small circles around ourselves. We must be generous, not only to our family members but also to friends and neighbors and the society around us. We want to give out not only things but also our whole being to the last person alive, stretching ourselves until we can reach the other end of the world. There is no limitation according to East and West in our life. Nations that long have been enemies can come together and love each other. We can enjoy things among ourselves, sharing with each other what we have cherished. Since there is no barrier whatsoever, there are no enemies; we can safely say that we are the happiest people. In human society some people want to possess more than other people and they want to invade others' ownership to possess more people, more land, and so on. That's what makes people fight. Where the principle of true love is put into practice, there cannot be such a thing. If you want to possess things with a self-centered motive, you are liable to ruin.

In love your trials and your struggles are not painful. However hard we have to toil and labor, we are happy to do that. This is the secret to possessing love.

Love is something precious that you want to keep deep inside yourself like a secret. This secret between you and God will make you great. In giving out the love of



God to other people you are sharing your love with them, and your love, rather than being diminished, will be multiplied. You will be proud of what you have given. Only by giving can we receive. So we want to give out our whole being. Are you going to be really generous givers?

We have talked about happiness. From this perspective we have to truly understand what is the happy way of life. Then if we choose to live in this fashion, we don't try to attract love or people to ourselves, but people will come to be our friends without our making any special efforts. Then you are where God wants you to be. Through logic and reason you see clearly that in this huge and complicated world every imaginable wall exists. You cannot even travel a short distance without being blocked by some kind of barrier. Only through true love can you go anywhere you choose — a good place or a dangerous place. You can go anywhere fearlessly with a truly loving heart.

Life is like a river

Be patient — it takes time to become a person of true love. We cannot just do it in a moment of magic. It takes many days, weeks, years, and we have to make consistent effort. To graduate from school takes a number of years. If you are learning to go to Heaven, can you do that overnight? You might see a cloudy sky and say, "Oh, it might rain today, so I don't want to go to school." Would you be allowed to do that?

If you say you hate to undergo disciplined training because you don't like it, you have been defeated already. It's good to have the attitude that you want to face

whatever comes with great expectation and interest. Try not to look through just one point of focus, but look around at your situation in all four directions. Looking at a mighty river, you know the deep water runs silently. But upstream there have already been many events: Sometimes the water swirls in a deep eddy; sometimes it pounds down on the rocks, as a waterfall; sometimes it rushes past big rocks or runs over small pebbles to be gathered into the ocean. If you are faced with a very rough current when in a boat, you cannot just look immediately in front of you, but you must set your gaze far and wide, and you must be quick to manipulate the boat. Otherwise it will be wrecked on the rocks right before you. In your life too, there are waterfalls; sometimes the water will even form walls or cliffs in front of you. So you must dodge quickly past one place or steer directly through the waves in another.

Be prepared for the wave. If you are riding the wave, however hard you may struggle not to be carried on the current, you cannot resist it. If your destiny is to float on the current of the river, you must flow as it does. You may very well be like the waterfall or the water running past the rapids, but don't become discouraged by the roughness of your course. If you are trained on

this course, things to come will become easier for you to handle. If you take interest in what you are going through, and if you are thrilled to find new adventures, then when you are faced with even greater difficulties, you can tackle those with more zeal and capability. But if you are unwilling to confront the problems occurring in the environment around you and are afraid of them, then you will not be able to turn





the experience into training to face new problems. Only by having gone over the rocks and waterfalls can you lead yourself to the heart of the ocean.

Do not fear what lies ahead — go all the way

We must look at how the water runs down from the mountaintop. It will encounter many obstacles. If we compare our lives to that stream of water, where are we? Can the drops of water say, “I hate to pound down the cliff”? At the top of the cliff you must get ready and say to yourself, “It’s thrilling, and I want to jump down from this cliff and reach the ocean as soon as possible.” If you are eager, then you will succeed and attain your purpose.

Under the Roman Empire, Christians were faced with iron bars when they tried to advance. But because Christians had more onward determination than the stopping power of Rome, Christianity overflowed and flooded the Roman nation and the world.

Our life itself is something like a river. Unless you can flow past all the obstacles in the tributaries, you cannot meet the main river. You are all a part of one group now, but once you graduate from school then you will be like small streams running through your own course to reach the mainstream. You cannot foretell if all of you will meet at the mouth of the river. You do not know if you all will reach the heart of the ocean. If you are faced with any power stronger than your own determination, what will you do? If you are faced with a power greater than your own strength or spirit, will you be absorbed and surrender? It is not easy to answer.

Sometimes people are small-minded. If a difference of interest occurs between you and another person, you may become angry with each other and argue. Then someone else may want to reconcile the conflict between you and say pacifying things to you both; but you will only become more fierce toward each other. If you had a broader mind and would let the other go, that person would cling to you and want to solve the problem. You should be of such a broad mind that you can smile and return to the work waiting for you. If you are like water trying to surmount a wall, you will be eager to rush over it as soon as possible and join the larger body. Time will solve the problem. If you can pass on from the difficult place quickly, you will succeed. Tell the other drops of water, “You may stay there, but I must rush on.”

Overcome with love and be victorious

As you go along, it’s good to be able to add something to what you are. You have heard of many successful people in history. In their backgrounds they have many adventures. The more they have had to overcome in their lives, the greater people they are. If someone has had even one more such experience than another, he is a little bigger person than the person with less experience.

When our circumstances are difficult, we must be determined to face these and win over them; otherwise we will be defeated in the long run. How to digest and conquer your environment is the question. Don’t try to escape from life, but feel challenged and persevere on your way. On an uneven road, ups and downs are to be expected; but where there are peaks, there are valleys at another time.



Imagine yourself in a race, feeling that kind of determination, so that you can win over whatever the obstacle may be. When you are faced with difficulties that look really hopeless, you may feel as though you are going to perish indeed; but there is always a way out if you look for one. Try to focus on today, on this very moment, and if you are alert in winning the very moment you are faced with, you will set the pattern for being a victor your whole life through.

And when our life on this earth is completed, the record of how we lived will become the measure for how much heaven we deserve. This will be the standard:

- ✕ The love you unselfishly bestowed upon your fellow man;
- ✕ The service you willingly rendered for the benefit of others;
- ✕ The sacrifice you courageously offered for humanity and for God.

The sum total of these deeds will become your treasure for eternity.

— Entire text excerpted from a speech by Dr. Sun Myung Moon

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