

Why Ethics ?

(Contd. from last issue)

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The need to behave in an ethical manner is emphasized in ancient Indian epistemology in a very logical manner. Ethics is part and parcel of Dharma. Dharma is a quality well understood by the ancients. Dr Radhakrishnan opined that it is what the Greeks meant by Agape. In Latin it was translated as Caritas which came to English as Charity. Today Dharma takes its connotation from its context. It could mean the giving of alms in one context to obligation in another context. It is the most important of the four qualities or *Purusharthas* which mark a well lived life. It is a quality marked by sympathy and understanding to all around us. It is an attitude of disinterested love. It is an attitude of understanding and benevolence to mankind to the Earth and to the Cosmos. If we have this attitude, we will treat others as we would ourselves like to be treated. We cannot but behave in an ethical manner. To act ethically is to follow the Path of Dharma.

It is a fact that if we uphold Dharma, Dharma will protect us. This happens in several ways. It is a matter of cause and effect. Sometimes it may be simple and direct. For example if the Banks sell junk bonds to

unsuspecting parties, which is an unethical practice, it will boomerang in such a way that not only will the banks have to fold up as result of economic recession without punitive action by the authorities but cause hardship to many others. When Ethics is breached, when Dharma is neglected, many innocents suffer with the guilty! When we mindlessly destroy the atmosphere, we risk the dangers of climate change and all that it implies. If an individual acts unethically, his conscience gives him hell sooner than later! Or he may be born over and over till he atones for his wrong doing. An intuitive knowledge of such matters falls in the realm of Paravidya. It is part of the psychobaggage of Humanity.

Often the unethical cause of misery may not be proximate. It could be quite remote. Here we have to bring in the concept of the rhythm of nature, the Rithu. A transgression of this is unethical. For example, if we feed cattle the offal of our non-veg food forgetting that cows are naturally vegetarians, we find to our cost that unheard of diseases proliferate. It was common knowledge not only in ancient India that moral laws and natural laws are inextricably bound together..

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There are more points in favor of behaving ethically. We have mentioned the four *Purusharthas* earlier. These are DHARMA, ARTHA, KAMA, MOKSHA. Of this quartet of qualities, which distinguish a well-lived life, Dharma is the most important. It is the absence of this which according to St Paul, makes a man however talented he be or eloquent he be, no better than polished brass or the clash of cymbals. A well known post ear Japanese Prime Minister Mr. Tanaka was known to have the brain of a mighty computer and the push of a bulldozer. Yet since he lacked ethics, he was indicted for financial misdeeds. When he fell , it was a mighty fall.

Psychologists have pointed out the role which the absence of ‘meaning’ or of sex play in incipient dementia. Sigmund Freud showed the

significance of sex in mental health. Dr Frankel observed that those who found a meaning in life, could not be broken even by the most adverse conditions of a Nazi concentration camp. These insights were put to good use in clinical practice. We may interpret their insights in terms of ancient Indian understanding. ARTHA and KAMA play a crucial role in mental health. It is possible that a modern savant would be able to use modern methods and establish the connection between DHARMA that is Ethical behavior and mental health. It is common knowledge that people are happiest and most productive when they perceive that they are in an ethical environment.

It is worthwhile to remember that if we look after Dharma, that if we look after ethics, it will look after us!



THE DRUG OF WISDOM

“The only agency which can harmlessly interfere with the mind’s working, intercept it, moderate it, reform and refine it effectively is the intelligence. As is the mind an invisible product, the intelligence too is. To act upon the invisible mind we will use a similar entity, the intelligence. The object is to produce the healthiest effect in the minds of working. While a drug acts on the body, the drug of wisdom acts on the mind directly, giving no side or adverse effect on the body.”

- Swami Bhoomanand Tirtha - Divinizing Every Moment: