

Fear—The Evil in Our Life

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Before I go into the subject, let me narrate an experience. In my early age, I came into contact with a person. His name was Abhaya. Since he was senior to me, as is the custom in Bengal, I used to call him Abhayada. Whenever I recall him, my head bows down spontaneously in great respect. He is still living in my memory even after his death twenty years back.

Once he took me out for a long drive. On our way, in the afternoon, he stopped the vehicle near a *dhaba* on GT Road. I noticed, as he got down from the vehicle, one gentleman from the *dhaba* rushed to him and touched his feet in a reverential manner and very gently smiled at us. Then he took us inside the *dhaba*. I was surprised to see the high degree of hospitality extended to us by the *dhawala*. At least two hundred customers were taking their lunch at that time. I counted one hundred employees who were working there. It was really a high quality *dhaba* in all respects. The waiters seen in tidy uniform were very courteous to the customers. The kitchen was also equipped with sparkling modern appliances. It was really a fantastic experience in my life.

On our way back, I could not suppress my curiosity and asked Abhayada about his relationship with the *dhawala*. Abhayada smiled curiously at me and in a very casual manner said that the *dhawala* was a burglar in his youth. He caught him along with two other associates in his house singlehanded at midnight when they were

about to escape with ornaments and cash worth around rupees 50,000. Abhayada excused their guilt. Even he did not take back his belongings from them on condition that they would give up burglary forever and earn their livelihood in a moral way. Abhayada himself cooked for them that night and served them dinner. In the morning, before they left Abhayada's house, they all touched his feet with tearful eyes and promised not to commit any immoral act in future.

What a fearless mind Abhayada possessed! He was apparently so simple and ordinary in nature but quite different inwardly—full of strength and courage. From that very day Abhayada became an icon to me. And I believe, it was Abhayada's inherent spirit of sacrifice and compassionate nature which made him so fearless.

The nature of fear

We know that fear is a manifestation of a weak state of mind when people lose intelligence. Then one fails to understand things and becomes incapable of taking a decision. It is absolutely unmanliness and base weakness of heart. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, it is called '*klaibyam*'. Sri Krishna himself exhorts us through Arjuna, '*Klaibyam māśma gamah Pārtha naitat tvayy upapadyate / Kshudram hridaya-daurbalyam tyaktv'ottishtha parantapa*' ['O Arjuna, do not yield to unmanliness. This does not befit you. O chastiser of enemies, give up this base weakness of heart and rise

up’]. This wonderful verse was most favourite to Swami Vivekananda. He expounded that we shall have to face up to the problems and manifest our strength, for it is fear that brings misery, death, and evil. And what causes fear? Do not be afraid, he says, of losing your respect or of causing unhappy friction. Rest assured that if you serve truth in spite of temptations to forsake, you will attain a heavenly strength. Indeed, whatever crimes take place in society, it is because of fear. It is only a coward who commits crimes because he fears the truth.

Two specific fears

Let me mention two specific fears. One stems from immoral acts, while the other one evolves out of negative attitudes or wrong notions. A person who fails to control desires commits immoral acts and cannot get rid of fear. Fear follows him or her like a shadow. Here is an example.

Once I was waiting at a railway platform to receive one of my relatives. It was winter. I wore an ash colour coat that day. As the train arrived, I was surprised to notice that some commuters diverted their way to the other gate thinking me to be a ticket collector. I observed their frightened face as they did not have valid tickets. There is a well-known phrase in Bengali—‘Who’s there in the shrine? I didn’t eat bananas!’ This phrase refers to one young boy who entered into the shrine and stole a few bananas. But while carelessly stealing, he made a sound of utensils. The mother woke up and cried, ‘Who is there?’ The boy immediately answered, ‘I didn’t eat bananas.’ A guilty mind is thus caught automatically. Our thoughts and attitudes are thus exposed to others naturally. It is quite impossible to hide one’s own being by any kind of trick. A sensible person realizes that. Therefore, he never waits till the public react. He knows, the public do not react to

every nuisance, so it is better to rectify himself in time. This kind of thought thus purifies his mind and strengthens it tremendously.

When fear prevents us from doing any good work, it is called cowardice. Great personalities never indulge in cowardice and condemn it as the greatest sin. Indeed, people commit blunder when they are under the spell of fear. And who does not suffer from this fear psychosis? The educated, the rich, the intellectual—fear grips them all. I will mention another incident related to this matter.

I know a general physician. Perhaps he is one among the very few doctors who responds to the patients’ call round the clock. Neither he hesitates to visit the patients’ houses, even at odd hours, nor he charges any extra fees for that. One day two or three smart persons came to his residence when he was busy with the patients. They instructed the doctor to ask his patients to clear out of the chamber immediately. As soon as the patients left, they introduced themselves as CBI personnel, holding the rank of IPS. Also, they declared that they had come to raid the house. Moreover, they weakened the doctor psychologically by asking numerous questions related to his income, property, trade license etc. The team exaggerated the petty matter beyond measure and made it a mountain out of a molehill. Then they started threatening the doctor and reminded him of the consequences like arrest, cancellation of registration, seizure of house and property etc. Ultimately they proposed a compromise deal and demanded a huge cash. The frightened doctor obeyed them and settled the issue accordingly. The gentle doctor realized this drama enacted by the fake CBI team only after they left his residence with a cash of one lakh rupees along with a blank cheque for another one lakh.

The blunder made by the doctor may not be approved by everybody and they may give many reasons why the doctor shouldn't have acted the way he did. However, it is a very difficult task to tackle such an awkward situation for a person who never faced such an odd incident.

With this, I would like to add one more incident. One person known to me lodged a diary about his missing wife who left home with her small kid without giving any intimation. After two days, the gentleman himself managed to trace her. He then revisited the police station to withdraw the diary. The ASI on duty then gave him a paper to sign. Surprisingly, the paper contained a statement that he lodged a *false* complaint. The gentleman refused to sign the fabricated statement. At that point the ASI lost his temper and alleged that he had beaten up his wife and driven her out of the house. The gentleman, however, did not get nervous. He tackled the issue very calmly and ultimately managed to get a fresh and correct statement from the ASI to sign. This fearless attitude thus saved him from doing a mistake.

Analysis of the cases

In the second case, the doctor could have overcome the situation through awareness of such fraud cases. But in real life, it is not always possible to handle a puzzling situation by awareness of some facts only, because devilish cunning innovates countless new ploys regularly. Swami Vivekananda says, 'Evil changes in form, but remains the same in quality. In ancient times force ruled, today it is cunning. . . . Good and evil are inextricably combined, and one cannot be had without the other. . . . In the human body the balance between good and evil is so even that there is a chance for man to wish to free himself from both'.¹

We need a permanent solution to overcome fear. Without shoes, feet will be injured any time in a thorny place. If we protect our feet wearing shoes, it becomes easy to move across the thorny area freely. Likewise, we are to protect ourselves by the shield of fearlessness.

Until we learn to make the shield of fearlessness, there is no permanent solution to handle the evils at all. Swami Ranganathananda, the 13th President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, explained it as follows:

What is the name of God? Fearlessness. And when you attain God, you become fearless. . . . A human being can become fearless by realizing one's own inherent divine nature. . . . That is the message of Vedanta. The more spiritual you become, the more fearless and strong you become, and the more compassionate also. You combine two great virtues: fearlessness and compassion. In all Indian literature, you find this confluence of two difficult virtues, difficult to co-exist: intense fearlessness, intense compassion. You can be fearful, so that others are frightened. Or, you can be so weak, anybody can frighten you. These extremes we have seen. But this rare combination is highlighted in the whole of our literature. And in this very *Gītā*, when you come to its twelfth chapter, Sri Krishna will tell 'he or she is my true devotee'—the one who is strong and fearless, and yet is compassionate to all beings. He doesn't fear anybody; but nobody need to fear him also, because he is so gentle . . . that is the sign of spiritual growth and spiritual realization.²

Here is one more tragic, yet inspiring incident. One young girl was being teased by five youngsters in a train. She was crying for help but nobody raised any voice. Naturally, the brutes became more desperate and started molesting the girl. All of a sudden one young man came forward and intervened in order to rescue the girl. The

situation turned more grim thereafter. The gang started beating the young man mercilessly. The passengers scattered in the compartment started leaving their seats one by one while the young man was bleeding profusely and was about to be unconscious. But the next episode was unbelievable. Suddenly the youth got up with tremendous energy and attacked the gang.

Four of them jumped off the train, but the fifth one could not flee. The passengers then appeared there to assist and did the needful. The brave young man shared his experience with me afterwards. He told me, 'In my dying moment one thought clicked. It was Vivekananda's great teaching—'Face the brute, face the brute'. It awakened me. 'Why should I die this way? Should I not face the brute? The thought multiplied my courage and energy and I spontaneously got up and jumped over them.'

I like to refer to the fact that lay behind this great teaching of Swami Vivekananda. Once in Benaras, he was chased by some monkeys. Monkeys in Benaras are known to be very ferocious in nature. Swamiji was very tired and did not have enough strength to run as he could not arrange his food for last 2-3 days. As the monkeys came closer, he started running. At that moment, an old monk nearby shouted at him, 'Babaji, don't run away. Face the brutes.' Swamiji was struck by the words. Immediately he turned back towards the monkeys with a fierce look and they at last fled.

Most of us definitely have certain gallant moments in our lives. When we analyse those experiences we discover the truth, the source that gave us the courage and necessary strength. What is that fountain? It is the feeling of oneness with all. There is a tremendous motivational verse in the *Gītā* (6.32) in this regard. There Sri Krishna says, '*Ātma'upamyena sarvatra*

samam pashyati yo'rjuna / Sukham vā yadi vā duhkham sa yogi paramo matah'. It means, 'O Arjuna, that yogi is considered the best who judges what is happiness and sorrow in all beings by the same standard as he would apply to himself.' When a sister becomes the victim of an evil, a brother can never play the role of a bystander. He responds instantly because of the blood relation, ie feeling of oneness with her sister. But when a person, as mentioned in the incident above, adopts a heroic attitude, risking even his own life, to save an unknown one, is the virtue—'*Ātma-upamyena*', as he would apply to himself. The young man in the train applied that standard. In spite of that, such a person does not feel proud of his action. A spiritually evolved person is even-minded. He or she knows the art how to remain calm and steady in a critical moment. They face problems fearlessly and overcome them.

Signs of fearlessness

In one sentence Swami Vivekananda has given us the insignia of fearlessness. In his great message he says, '... Truth, purity, and unselfishness—wherever these are present, there is no power to crush the possessor thereof.'²³

So, first, we have to have recourse to Truth. We must stick to the teachings of the sages available in the scriptures like the Vedas and Upanishadas etc. Sri Krishna taught Arjuna the great virtue of *shraddhā* saying '*Shraddhāvān labhate jñānam*' (4.39). That is, the man who has faith attains knowledge. '*Shraddhā*' means faith, the positive frame of mind. Due to want of faith, the mind becomes cynical and one loses faith in human beings, loses faith in values. '*Shraddhā*' gives us the knowledge by which we can discriminate between a bad or a good thing; we know what to accept and

what to reject. By knowledge only, it can be realized. Swamiji says, ‘Truth is to be judged by truth and by nothing else. Doing good is not the test of truth; the Sun needs no torch by which to see it. Even if truth destroys the whole universe, still it is truth: stand by it’.⁴

Next is purity. We can feel the characteristics of a pure thing. Why do we desire a pure thing such as pure milk or pure ghee etc? Because they nourish our health, give us strength. When they are contaminated, they do harm to our health. Similarly, pure mind nourishes our thoughts. It never degrades the human being. It gives immense strength to the mind to eradicate any kind of fear.

Lastly, unselfishness. A true compassionate person—‘*Ātma-aupamyena sarvatra*’, is one who perceives in comparison with the self, all living entities equally in the happiness and distress. Swamiji says,

Learn to feel yourself in other bodies, to know that we are all one. Throw all other nonsense to the winds. Spit out your actions, good or bad, and never think of them again. What is done is done. Throw off superstitions. Have no weakness even in the face of death. . . . The weak, the fearful, the ignorant will never reach the Ātman’.⁵

The ways of attaining the qualities

Having known the importance of the qualities or virtues necessary to drive out all

fears, the question remains—how to attain these qualities? The answer has been given by Lord Krishna in the *Gītā* (6.36), ‘*Abhyāsenā tu kaunteya vairāgyena ca grihyate*’. It is possible to control the mind and achieve the goal by repeated practice and detachment. Detachment means that we avoid attractions of outward things in the nature during the course of practice. Based on the teachings of the *Gītā*, the following practices, I think, will help us attain the three virtues like Truth, Purity and Unselfishness as emphasized by Swami Vivekananda. These practices include the following:

(a) We should avoid telling lies, (b) avoid hypocrisy, (c) avoid exaggeration, (d) avoid jealousy, (e) avoid hatred, (f) avoid finding faults with others, (g) avoid hurting others, (h) we should stay alone for some time everyday and (i) observe our mind indifferently, (j) listen to the sound of heart, (k) help others as much as possible, at least pray for them, (l) avoid expecting return from others, (m) avoid dependence on others, (n) smile at others, (o) respect others’ thought, (p) feel anger as an alarm of destruction, (q) beware of fame and wealth, (r) feel Nature’s contribution to your life, (s) have company of positive thoughts, (t) avoid weak thoughts, (u) avoid attachment during practice, (v) have faith in practice, (w) avoid irrational thinking, (x) grow the habit of sacrifice, (y) have faith in will-power and (z) have faith in the self, before God. ■

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| | 4 <i>Ibid.</i> , Vol. VII, p. 101. |
| | 5 <i>Ibid.</i> , p. 91. |

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