

The Power of Goodness

Pavan Choudary explains why enduring victory is goodness and the need to enter evil occasionally

Abandon wrongdoing. It can be done. If there were no likelihood, I would not ask you to do it. But since it is possible and since it brings blessing and happiness, I do ask of you: abandon wrongdoing.

Cultivate doing good. It can be done. If it brought deprivation and sorrow, I would not ask you to do it. But since it brings blessing and happiness, I do ask of you: cultivate doing good.

— Anguttara Nikaya

From pure behaviour comes self-power, which frees a man from (many) dangers; pure conduct, like a ladder, enables us to climb to heaven.

— Fo-Sho-Hing-Tsan-King

Doing good has its own remainder: some of the perfume stays in the bottle.

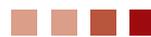
— Fred Smith

One of the key components required for an enduring victory is goodness. What is this goodness? Goodness encompasses honesty, loyalty, kindness, empathy, gratitude, and fairness. These attributes are necessary both to achieve and sustain success.

If success brings arrogance, failure will follow. If success brings dictatorial tendencies, mutinies will erupt. On the other hand, if success brings the feeling that you are a divine instrument to look after the welfare of those around you, more success will follow. Even grandeur may come.

Can goodness be learnt? Of course. Read the following

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enlightening paragraph from *The Devil & Miss Prym* by Paulo Coelho.

That's right. Except that, before going to sleep, the two of them talked together for a while. Even though Ahab (the bad one, [sic!]) had begun to sharpen his knife the moment the saint set foot in his house, safe in the knowledge that the world was a reflection of himself. He was determined to challenge the saint and so, he asked him: "If tonight, the most beautiful

prostitute in the village came in here, would you be able to see her as neither beautiful nor seductive?"

"No, but I would be able to control myself," the saint replied. "And if I offered you a pile of gold coins to leave your cave in the mountains and come and join us, would you be able to look on that gold and see only pebbles?"

"No, but I would be able to control myself." "And if you were sought by two brothers, one of whom hated you, and the other who saw you as a saint, would you be able to feel the same towards them both?"

"It would be very hard, but I would be able to control myself sufficiently to treat them both the same." Chantal paused.

'They say this dialogue was important in Ahab's conversion to Christianity.'

The stranger did not need Chantal to explain the story. Savin



and Ahab had the same instincts — good and evil struggled in both of them, just as they do in every soul on the face of the earth. When Ahab realized that Savin was the same as him, he realized that he too was same as Savin.

It was all a matter of control. And choice. Nothing more and nothing less.

Mahesh Bhatt, a thought leader of the Indian film industry, narrates this story, which his mother used to tell him and which takes this point a little further. She used to tell him, “There is a bad dog and a good dog in everyone of us. Whenever we are at moral crossroads these two dogs start fighting.”

“Who wins?” he used to ask.

“The one you feed more,” would be his mother’s reply. How do you feed the good dog? And what food do you provide? Company of good people is one. Unshakable belief in the power that good ultimately triumphs, is the other.

Believing that good lies dormant in some and a strong, selfless initiative can wake it up, is the third. If you feed the good dog within you with these three kinds of food, it is not only able to overpower the bad dog within you, but also, the bad dogs around you. As the Dhammapada says: No flower’s scent goes against the wind — not sandalwood, jasmine, tagara. But the scent of the good does go against the wind. The person of integrity wafts a scent in every direction.

He (the good) doesn’t need the wind to spread his perfume. He is himself a windmill powered by the energy of the Universe.

When you live with good values, brick by brick, you construct a temple through your good conduct. By the time it is ready, you realise, it is also a castle. It has made you impregnable. The robe has become the armour.

Power of Entering Evil

According to a Buddhist tale, “A house has caught fire. The adults

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have escaped but a few children are playing inside. Surrounded by the flames, unmindful of the danger and admiring the sight of the fire. The parents outside are shouting, exhorting them to come out but they ignore their appeal, busy in their game.

Which is when a sage happens to pass by. He takes stock of the situation and calls out to the children, “Come out, I have brought toys for you from the market.” On hearing this, the children come out running. The parents and the bystanders profusely thank the sage but ask him, “You are an epitome of truth but you resorted to a lie.” He replies, “A man of truth knows when a lie is as sacred as the truth and can utter it for the benefit of his fellow beings.” Abraham Lincoln realised that the slavery abolishment bill will fall for want of two votes. So, he said that those two votes must be procured. When asked, “How?” he remarked: “I am President of the United States, clothed with great power. The abolition of slavery by constitutional provision settles the fate, for all coming time, not only of the millions now in bondage, but of un-born millions to come — a measure of such importance that those two votes must be procured. I leave it to you to determine how it shall be done; but remember that I am President of the United States, clothed with immense power, and I expect you to procure those votes.” These gentlemen understood the significance of the remark. The votes were procured.

The bill was passed. A huge

swathe of humanity broke its bondage. Lincoln died soon after. His death overtook the events and which is why he didn’t have to pay a price for the deed. The deed accused him but the results excused him.

Learning from Romulus

Romulus — the founder of Rome — was the man who made laws for free existence. To establish a civil society in Rome, Romulus had to first kill his brother, and then consent to the killing of his partner even though, initially, he had himself chosen this partner to share the kingdom with him. Prima facie, these acts make him appear violent, ruthless and unfaithful. However, because his intention was not to grab power but to introduce sociopolitical equality, Romulus is lauded not denigrated. Soon after the murder of his brother and his partner, Romulus instituted a senate for consultation, followed the advice given by them, and thus laid the foundations for what we today call democracy. To enact your position of justice you must gain authority first.

Your journey to power may need you to enter evil once in a while. The noble and wise man knows when to do so, and exits soon after. He enters evil to overcome it. And then exits it.

Secondly the belief that ‘power corrupts’ needs to be revisited. Personalities like Swami Vivekananda, Mother Teresa and President Obama prove that benign power can be a reality. Not only do they preach and speak about kindness but practice it even after rising to power. Whether power will corrupt or exalt depends more on who it is vested in. Power in Genghis Khan’s hands could corrupt but in Mother Teresa’s hands would exalt. ■



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