

NOBILITY

-CA Mayur Nayak

Wikipedia defines "nobility" as "a social class which possesses more acknowledged privileges or eminence than members of most other classes in a society, membership therein typically being hereditary. The privileges associated with nobility may constitute substantial advantages over or relative to non-nobles, or may be largely honorary (e.g. precedence), and vary from country to country and from era to era. Traditionally, membership in the nobility has been regulated or acknowledged by the government. There is often a variety of ranks within the noble class."

Thus, the traditional meaning of "nobility" refers to the representation of the higher stratum of a society in which social classes can be distinguished. The most distinctive feature of nobility is that once acquired, being hereditary, it is passed on to descendants, possibly according to some rules. The word "noble" in "nobility" also means "is doing an act worthy of respect" to people. It is basically, a class of people qualified, usually by inherited status, to exercise lordship¹.

Some of the dictionary meanings of "Nobility" are "aristocracy, elite, high society, lords, nobles, patricians, peerage, ruling class, upper class"². However, being wealthy or influential per se does not make one noble, nor are all nobles wealthy or influential (aristocratic families have lost their

¹ Source: <http://www.best-quotes-poems.com/nobility-quotes.html>

² Thesaurus by Collins

fortunes in various ways, and the concept of the 'poor nobleman' is almost as old as nobility itself)³.

To my mind "Nobility" is a characteristic virtue of great minds. Those who understand the spiritual connection of human beings and purpose of human life are great people – truly noble. A person may acquire a status of being a "noble" but it is only his quality of "nobility" that will make him truly noble and help rule the hearts of people. Gandhiji never enjoyed formal power, yet he ruled over the hearts of millions – a true noble in real sense of the term and therefore people called him "Mahatma". To quote Henry wordsworth Longfellow who said "A person may be noble by birth, but would be nobler by great deeds".

Let us therefore discuss the "nobility" in an altogether different context than the traditional meaning which got attached to certain social status or class of people in the society.

Some of the synonyms used by Collins Thesaurus for "nobility" are "dignity, eminence, excellence, grandeur, greatness, illustriousness, loftiness, magnificence, majesty, nobleness, stateliness, sublimity, superiority, worthiness, integrity, honour, incorruptibility, uprightness and virtue". Perhaps, it is difficult to define "nobility" in one word or one sentence. It is a state of being. It is perhaps a combination of all the above virtues. Let us look at "nobility" in this perspective.

We shall look at some of the facets of a noble person or how nobility manifests in a person.

³ Wikipedia

It is said, noble thoughts lead to noble cause/purpose. When we work for noble cause with a noble heart filled with divine energy of love, it would lead us to nobility of action/service/character. A person who imbibes all these virtues in his life, namely (i) nobility of thoughts, (ii) nobility of purpose, (iii) nobility of heart, and (iv) nobility of action would ultimately lead a noble life i.e. nobility of life. Let us look at each of these virtues in depth:

(i) **Nobility of Thought**

“The greatest secret of life is the law of attraction, which says likes attract likes, so when you think a thought, you are also attracting similar thoughts to you.”⁴

A person who thinks negative will attract negative energy and encounter failure, whereas a positive person will attract positivity and succeed in life. Therefore it is said, Success comes in CANs! “If you think you CAN, you CAN.” However, if you think you are beaten, you are. If you think you’ll lose, you have lost already. A man first fails at the mental level and then in the outside world. The world is nothing but manifestation of our perception and thoughts. Were this not so, then why the same glass looks to someone half filled and to the other half empty.

In the Bible⁵ it is said: “As he thinketh his heart, so is he”. In the words of Marci Shimoff “everything you want is an inside job! The outside world is the world of effects; it’s just the result of thoughts. Every thought of yours is the real thing – a force.” It is my experience that our thoughts are our seeds, and the harvest we reap will depend

⁴ Rhonda Byrne in her book titled “the Secret”

⁵ Proverbs 23:7

upon the seeds we plant. In other words, we shall manifest or create things or situations we think about the most or focus on the most.

Someone has beautifully said:

“Watch your thoughts, for they become words.

Watch your words, for they become actions.

Watch your actions, for they become habits.

Watch your habits, for they become character.

Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.”

Thus, thoughts have power to make or mar our destiny. Therefore, we may be lenient with our food habits, but cannot afford to be lenient with our thinking habit. We must be careful about what we think and how we think. Remember that a person with noble thoughts would be beaming with positivity. He would be confidence personified and would develop a good character eventually.

We must remember that all great inventions, discoveries were at first thought out by someone. There are noble thoughts behind all great creations and successes in this world. It is now scientifically proved that thought is energy and therefore, positive thoughts will release positive energy which in turn enables an individual to attain a higher cause/purpose in life. Thus, nobler thoughts would lead to nobler causes /purposes in life.

(ii) **Nobility of Cause/Purpose**

Great men are those who have had noble purposes to achieve, great tasks to perform, or mighty causes to vindicate.

- Leo J. Muir⁶

Great minds have purposes, whereas others have only wishes. Great purposes demand strong minds, whereas weak minds are good enough for wishful thinking. For achieving a purpose or pursuing a cause, one needs conviction from within. Nobler the cause, greater will be conviction from within. Once you are convinced about the purpose, you do not need any certification or recognition from the world. The reward would then be in the work itself.

Martin Luther King Junior had said "Most of these people will never make the headlines and their names will not appear in Who's Who. Yet when years will have rolled past and when the blazing light of truth is focused on this marvelous age in which we live - men and women will know, and children will be taught that we have a finer land, a better people, a more noble civilization - because these humble children of God were willing to suffer for righteousness' sake."

A story about one such noble person was reported in the Times of India, Mumbai edition dated 17th November 2011. It is about a 44-year-old Abdul Sattar who waits at the Delhi's suicide point (i.e. the Wazirabad Bridge over the river Yamuna) from Sunrise to sunset every day to save those who want to die. He has reportedly, saved over

⁶ Source: Flashes from the Eternal Semaphore, 1928

1000 lives in the last 23 years. He has been engaged in an unusual occupation, risking his own life to save those who would rather be dead. The unfortunate part of the story is that he is neither being paid by Government, despite promises in the past, nor accorded public recognition. But did that stop the noble work of Sattar? No way. He continues to wait by the Yamuna River everyday as he believes that "no matter how awful it's been, life deserves a second chance."

Such nobler or unsung heroes do not work for name, fame or prestige. They are driven by their firm conviction in righteousness and purposefulness of life. As rightly put by Plato "If a man be endowed with a generous mind, this is the best kind of nobility." The generosity comes from a heart filled with love and compassion for others.

(iii) **Nobility of Heart**

A person with a noble heart is considerate, kind and above all, empathetic to the needs and aspirations of others. I am reminded of a beautiful story of "Kabuliwala" – a real life incident recorded by none other than the poet laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

Tagore's daughter "Mini" (when she was five year old) was fond of one Mr. Rahmun whom she used to lovingly call "Kabuliwallah". They shared many quaint jokes, which afforded them much amusement. Seated in front of him, looking down on his gigantic frame in all her tiny dignity, Mini would ripple her face with laughter and begin: "O Kabuliwallah, Kabuliwallah, what have you got in your bag?"

And he would reply, in the nasal accent of the mountaineer: "An elephant!" Not much cause for merriment, perhaps; but they both enjoyed the witticism!

Then the Kabuliwallah, not to be left behind, would take his turn: "Well, little one, and when are you going to the father-in-law's house?"

And Mini would quickly ask: "Are you going there?"

Amongst men of the Kabuliwallah's class, however, it is well known that the words father-in-law's house have a hidden meaning. It is a euphemism for jail, the place where we are well cared for, at no expense to ourselves. "Ah," he would say, shaking his fist at an invisible policeman, "I will thrash my father-in-law!" Hearing this, and picturing the poor discomfited relative, Mini would go off into peals of laughter, in which her formidable friend would join.

One day the Kabuliwallah was arrested for attacking one of his customers who refused to pay his dues. He was put behind the bars. Years rolled by and Mini grew up, totally oblivious of her childhood associates, the Kabuliwallah. However, on the day of Mini's wedding, the Kabuliwallah reached her house. He still carried the impression of young little Mini who used to play with him. Evidently, in Mini, the Kabuliwallah used to see his own daughter of same age.

He met Tagore and enquired about Mini. He expressed his desire to meet her. However, as per traditions in vogue then, it was not possible for Mini to come out.

Permission declined, the Kabuliwallah twined on his heels begged Tagore thus: "May I not see the little one, sir, for a moment?" It was his belief that Mini was still the same. He had pictured her running to him as she used to, calling "O Kabuliwallah! Kabuliwallah!" He had also imagined that they would laugh and talk together, just as of old. In

fact, in memory of former days he had brought, carefully wrapped up in paper, a few almonds and raisins and grapes.

Seeing the affection of the Kabuliwallah for Mini, Tagore was in tears. For a moment, he forgot that the Kabuliwallah was a poor Kabuli fruit-seller, not matching his status—He said to himself “how am I more than him?” Kabuliwallah is also a father. That impression of the hand of Kabuliwallah’s little Parbati in her distant mountain home reminded Tagore of his own little Mini.

Therefore, notwithstanding the tradition, seeing the desperation and tears in the eyes of the Kabuliwallah, Tagore called for Mini. Clad in the red silk of her wedding-day, with the sandal paste on her forehead, and adorned as a young bride, Mini came, and stood by, bashfully.

The Kabuliwallah stared at the apparition. He could not believe his eyes, leave alone reviving their old friendship. At last, he smiled and said: “Little one, are you going to your father-in-law's house?” But that Mini has understood the meaning of the word “father-in-law,” she could not respond, as of old. She blushed and stood before him with her bride-like face looking down.

When she retreated, Rahmun heaved a deep sigh, and sat down on the floor. Suddenly the idea struck him that his daughter, too, must have grown in this span of time, and that he would have to make friends with her afresh. Assuredly he would not find her, as he used to know her. And besides, what might not have happened to her in these past years?

Tagore took out a bank-note, and gave it to him, saying: "Go back to your own daughter, Rahmun, in your own country, and may the happiness of your meeting bring good fortune to my child!"

Having made this present, Tagore had to curtail some of the festivities. He could neither have the electric lights he had intended nor the military band. But to him the wedding feast was all the brighter for the thought that in a distant land a long-lost father met again with his only child.

No wonder such a noble hearted person wrote the National Anthem of India. The Nobility of Rabindranath Tagore won him many laurels in life, including the acclaimed Nobel Prize for literature.

(iv) **Nobility of Action/Service**

To serve is the nature of Divine!

-Sri Sri Mahavtar Babaji

As stated earlier, "nobility" is a combination of different virtues such as generosity, integrity, compassion, kindness and so on. A person with a noble heart will have noble thoughts and a noble cause to pursue. Nobility of cause leads to nobility of action or service which is but manifestation of nobility itself. Who else than Mother Teresa, can be an epitome of such Nobility of service?

In May 2008, I visited a place called *Nirmal Hriday* (Tender-Hearts) - a home for the dying destitutes run by the Mother Teresa Foundation in Kolkata. I was touched to the core by the selfless services rendered to the terminally ill. I found that they pick people up dying on the roads and provide them not only refuge till their departure but also shower love, care and affection. One of the volunteers said, that "we are really

doing no great thing but just are serving the suffering humanity – a noble act, indeed, as it is said “*Manav Seva is Madhav Seva.*” To quote Mother Teresa, “the fruit of silence is prayer, the fruit of prayer is faith, the fruit of faith is love, the fruit of love is service, the fruit of service is peace.”

When a person serves selflessly to others, he is actually in divine communion with God, as spiritually we are all inter-connected.

(v) **Nobility of Life**

“Let this world be a little better because I came here”

-Aporesh Acharya

People who have lived a noble life are those who have made positive contribution to this world. History is replete with instances of such great personalities who were larger than their lives. To name a few, Aadi Shankaracharya, Jesus, a Buddha, Mahavir, Swami Narayan, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Prophet Muhammed and so on.

Gandhiji seeing the abject poverty in India renounced comforts and luxuries of life and wore a single dhoti through out his life.

About Gandhiji, Albert Einstein said: “Future generations will find it hard to believe that a man like this once walked among us”. No wonder he is the guiding beacon for millions even today. His messages of Truth and Non-violence are perhaps more relevant and apt in today’s violent and materialistic world than ever before.

Noble lives like Gandhiji and others continue to inspire generations to come. One of the most distinct features of Gandhiji’s personality was

his spiritual bent of mind. Nobility has direct connection with spirituality. So let us understand the relationship between the two.

Spiritual understanding of "Nobility"

Mr. Aporesh Acharya, the legendary trainer from Dale Carnegie Institute, used to say that: "This life is a gift of God and how we live would be our return gift to Him." Indeed, that set me thinking. What kind of life I should live to give a good return gift to my Lord, which would be appropriate? Will He be happy if I placed Him on the *altar* made of gold and precious stones and worship Him daily or will He be happy if I offer Him loads of money, bullion and riches of the world? Will He be happy if I continuously sing songs of praise and notionally offer Him sumptuous food? Assuming that all these do make Him happy, the million dollar question still remains: Where do I find Him? Is He there in idols or in temples, mosques or churches? How would I identify Him? Has anyone really seen Him?

Several questions crossed my mind until I began my search within.

In Bible it is said, God made man out of His own image. In Quran it is said, "Almighty Allah made man as his own deputy." Hindu scriptures say, "TAT TVAM ASI" ("You are That"). My inquiry further revealed that a man could well be a micro replica of the Macro. So, if we understand the micro, we can understand the macro as well. To illustrate, the quality of the sea water is embedded in its single drop, the taste of which would be sufficient for us to know that the entire sea is salty. All scriptures of world, all faiths, agree that God is one and indivisible. The universal energy is the same that enlivens all living beings on this planet. Now, scientifically it is proved that "matter" is made up of atoms, i.e. electron, proton and neutron. If we break them further what we get is pure energy. The entire manifestation on this planet is made up of matter and therefore the core of every being or thing is

energy proper. In other words, we are all connected by the same divine energy which enlivens all denizens – humans animals, insects and birds alike.

This understanding of oneness makes one aware of one's potential of abundance and that is nobility. I am reminded of Lawrence Gould who said "I do not believe the greatest threat to our future is from bombs or guided missiles. I don't think our civilization will die that way. I think it will die when we no longer care and the spiritual forces, that make us wish to be right and noble, die in our hearts." Thus, according to him, the very existence of human race is dependent on spiritual forces in our heart wherefrom desire springs in us to be righteous and consequently noble.

Nobility and Compassion

A noble person would live a life worthy of emulation. He would inspire others by his deeds and greatness of heart. History is replete with instances of such great souls who have made a difference to this world, by their noble act, be it prayer, compassion, sincerity, uprightness, integrity and incorruptibility. They are out to help others and that, too, in a dignified manner devoid of ego. Compassion is one such quality which makes a person noble and great not only in the eyes of mortals but even before the Almighty.

Let me give you a simile.

In a small remote village, there lived a kind hearted man, who was in pain seeing the suffering of his fellow poor villagers. However he was not rich and therefore, he used to pray "O Lord! please give me enough wealth so that I can help the needy and poor and remove their miseries". In the same

village, there lived another saintly soul who used to pray, "O Lord! You are very kind and omnipotent, please give enough means to all those needy and poor so that no one remains poor". Even though both the payers aim at the good of the common weal, the first one arises out of "mercy" (*daya*), whereas the second one sprang out of "compassion" (*Karuna*). The first person has sympathy for his fellow poor people; whereas the second person's heart is filled with empathy. In the first case, there is a "*karta bhav*" (i.e. I am the doer), wherein though intention is noble, it has seeds of ego; whereas in the second case, there is "*samarpan bhav*" (i.e. He is the doer, prayer being a device). In this sense, the righteous person surrenders to His will. In the ultimate, it may happen that the second person is bestowed with lot of wealth such that he could help the poor. Even if that happens, he would consider himself lucky to be worthy of His trust for helping others. He would thank Lord for using him as an instrument for helping the needy. He does not believe that he is the doer. Both cases reflect generosity, but according to me, the former would be more like a philanthropist, whereas the latter would be a real vehicle of generosity, both materially and spiritually at His will and command.

Sympathy is good at the material level but empathy leads up to spiritual growth. In empathy we step into the shoes of the sufferer and experience the same pain and agony as he is undergoing. Empathy is the result of compassion in heart. We need to be compassionate like Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi and the like. Gandhiji adopted only dhoti as his dress seeing the sufferings of poor Indians. How many of us can even think of such sacrifice? The Dalai Lama puts it succinctly: "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion; if you want to be happy, practice compassion".

Nobility and Generosity

I expect to pass through life but once. If therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do to any fellow being, let me do it now, and not defer or neglect it, as I shall not pass this way again.

~ William Penn

A noble person is essentially a generous person. Nobility compliments generosity.

An episode from Mahabharata describes the urgency of doing good deeds in life. Once a beggar came to Yudhishthira asking for alms. He called him the next day. Listening to this his brother, Bhima burst out in laughter. Embarrassed, Yudhishthira asks for the reason and Bhima says, "It appears that you have conquered death. Otherwise, how do you know that you will be alive tomorrow"? Thus any act of kindness or good deed that we think of doing, we must do it NOW. Life is a one way street. I have observed many a time in my life, when a good thought is not implemented then and there, the mind starts rationalizing against its implementation and even if it is implemented at a later date, it will stand diluted considerably.

Pass it on!

Jyot se jyot Jalate Chalo, Prem ki Ganga Bahate Chalo!

This famous couplet of a Hindi film is equally applicable to nobility. Like negative vibrations; positive vibrations and deeds are also contagious. That is why we have a saying that "a man is known by the company he keeps". If you are in a company of noble people, you are bound to be noble. A noble

person will be respectful, worthy, generous, honourable, upright, virtuous, magnanimous, loving, humble, compassionate, empathetic and supportive. Imagine what kind of legacy you would be leaving for the generation next with these virtuous in life.

Living our life nobly is not only beneficial to others; but also beneficial for our own growth and betterment as nicely put by George Washington Carver: "How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and strong; Because someday in your life you will have been all of these".

So let us consciously pass on this Godly virtue to others. Let us be the change that we want to see in the world.

Have you had a kindness shown?

Pass it on;

'Twas not given for thee alone,

Pass it on;

Let it travel down the years,

Let it wipe another's tears,

'Til in Heaven the deed appears -

Pass it on⁷.

So let us imbibe "nobility" in our person, So as to awaken the "**Giant**" within.

⁷ Henry Burton from *Pass It On*