

Honesty in Self Management

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Abstract: *Honesty is an important ingredient for Self management. The nature of the self and its peculiar ways have been studied with reference to three characteristics of life and five precepts as enunciated in Buddhism. Good qualities get strengthened and enhanced through practice of honesty, leading to better management of oneself and the society.*

Keywords: *Honesty, five precepts, three characteristics of life, Buddhism, self-management*

I. Introduction

We need to manage efficiently our day to day activities for smooth and peaceful functioning in this world. Nevertheless many of us fail in this respect resulting in sorrow, pain, anguish and fear. Suffering is a common experience faced by many of us in daily life. In the struggle for survival it is very difficult to achieve what one wants to. Even when the current aspirations are fulfilled there are many more to be taken care of and the process of fulfilment is endless. The process is akin to a bottomless bucket that never gets filled up. One never stops at an achievement, there are many more waiting in the queue to be attended to. Each human being represents a set of peculiar processes conditioned by incessant interactions with others and experiences accumulated in terms of memory there from. Therefore, interactions within a group of individuals can be considered as collision between several entities which are in essence dynamic processes. Lying is an important interpersonal phenomenon that serves the purpose of regulating social life [1]. The need for better human being is felt all over the world to reduce suffering in day to day life down to manageable proportions. This can be considered as a case of efficient self-management for each individual by conducting oneself such that there is peace, goodwill and amicable relationship prevailing in day to day living. To manage oneself efficiently, it is of paramount importance to know what one essentially is. Is it a fabricated entity, subject to change or is it permanent and unchangeable?

II. Self

Our daily experiences with ourselves and the world builds up the data bank in terms of memories interconnected with past interactions. It is these memories which largely control our behaviour in different situations. Memory is accumulation of impressions of past events and possibly it cannot cope with ever changing new challenges. Memory is long lasting but it is a product of thought which can never be profound. Thought may give itself greater value. One cannot go beyond thought, for the “one”, the maker of effort is the result of thought [2]. A part of the accumulated memory of an individual acts as self, which takes up the task of controlling daily activities. Self can be considered as a bundle of memories peculiar to each individual. It is at best an illusion to which one is attached to and keeps working for it till the last moment of life. The so called ‘I’ is the major culprit responsible for all the ills of the society. Who am I? This question has been asked from times immemorial. Over 2500 year ago, Buddha, the world honoured one, in a discourse (SN 22.45) answered this by promulgating three characteristics of life [3]:

(1) **Annica (English: impermanent)**, a Pali word, stands for incessant changes taking place in everything (animate and inanimate) belonging to this world.

(2) **Dukkha (English: suffering, unsatisfactoriness)**, a Pali word, stands for suffering (physical and mental) experienced by all beings (human, animals) primarily due to random changes taking place in all things of mind and matter leading to the phenomena of unsatisfactoriness.

(3) **Anatta (English: Egolessness, Essencelessness, Insubstantiality)**, a Pali word, pertains to nothingness: There is nothing abiding in this world i.e. the world is nothing but a random flow of processes having nothing at its base.

There is no individual to be found in the so called self that is cherished and every now and then attempts are made to fulfil ever changing desires endlessly. Alan Turing, the British Mathematician, first introduced the idea that all human solvable problems could be reduced to a set of algorithms [4] and that

machines could be programmed to mimic humans in thought. The response that accrues from the self during interaction with the outside world can never be adequate because the self, being a fabricated entity, is the result of the past and, therefore, cannot deal well with the ever changing present. Jiddu Krishnamurti [5] points out:

“You are not the observer watching it; without you, the thinker, the observer, it is not. You and nothingness are one. You and nothingness are joint phenomena, not two separate processes. Every effort of the self to be or not to be is a movement away from what is. Apart from its name, attributes, idiosyncrasies, possessions, what is the self? It is the fear of being nothing that drives the self into activity; but it is nothing, it is emptiness. If we are able to face that emptiness then fear altogether disappears and a fundamental transformation takes place.”

There has to be correct understanding and awareness of the phenomena. Suffering of the self is the invariable result of such interactions in daily life due to inadequate responses. To get rid of suffering new and so called better ways are devised by the self but there is no end to suffering. Now what an individual need to do in such circumstances? Is there any method by which the self can be improved by the self such that the responses to ever changing challenges grow better and better in course of time? Possibly there is an answer and the starting point is to characterize oneself by honestly listing one’s faults and then working on oneself for improving upon them gradually. Honesty is the major factor for taking up this task of self appraisal. This is applicable in all walks of life and for all the individuals working in all the conceivable professions. Harry Benjamin in his memoirs [6] points out his life’s lessons:

“Life has taught me that deceit and lies do no good to the one who perpetrates them. One may succeed for a while through such agencies (as also through stealing etc.), but in the end one finds that honesty in truth is the best policy. For if we treat other people fairly, then we tend to get treated fairly in return and vice versa”

Further look into another important lesson stated by Benjamin:

“Life has also taught me that, however much one may love or work for others, in essence one is always alone, and through this fact of our aloneness we come closest to the heart of life and of reality”

III. Honesty

Honesty and self appraisal are interconnected, for there cannot be any meaningful self appraisal without an honest and truthful revelation of oneself. Many factors, for example, sincerity, frankness, fearlessness, trustworthiness [Fig.1] are inter-related with honesty. Sincerity is an important trait of an honest individual stating genuineness and reality of oneself. The other factor namely, frankness refers to candid behaviour and being what one really is. These qualities can help in correct assessment of oneself where there is no fraud or deceit involved in the process. Every statement (good or bad) is stated about oneself as one really is. Truth gets an upper hand in any honest endeavour. An honest person has widely trusted circle of friends. Impact of honesty on other qualities help preserve cherished values of any society working for the welfare of its subjects. An honest person is always truthful and trusted by all those who come in contact with. Honesty has reinforcing effect on patience, integrity, reliability, loyalty, impartiality, ,forgiveness, fearlessness, humility, kindness and sincerity leading to wide spread respect and friendship enjoyed by those who come in contact with an honest individual. Our family life is preserved by honesty and one should be careful not to transgress honesty in any dealing and at any stage of life.

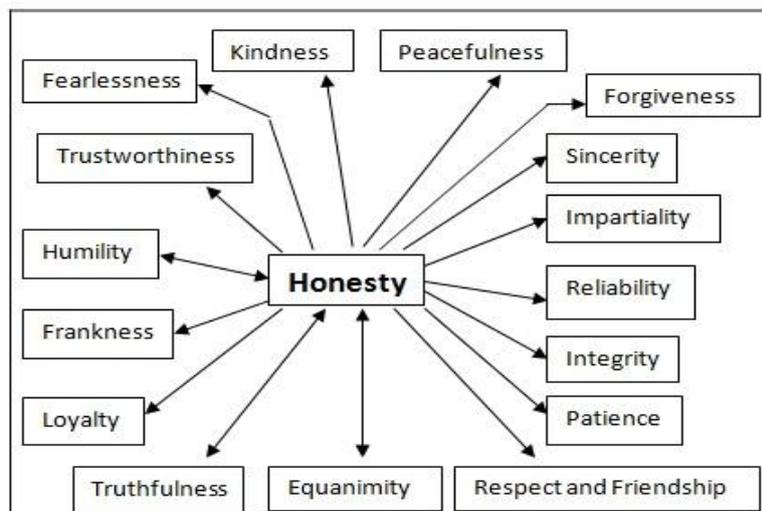


Fig. 1 Honesty and other qualities

An honest person follows the highest code of conduct and appreciates the interconnectedness of the world and its resources for optimum utilization for the welfare of all the members of the society.

Buddha formulated five precepts [7] to be followed by lay people:

- (1) Do not kill or destroy living creatures.
- (2) Do not steal.
- (3) Refrain from sexual misconduct.
- (4) Do not tell lies.
- (5) Do not take intoxicants.

These precepts should be followed meticulously in daily life for one's own welfare and also for that of the society one owes allegiance to. The desire to kill for food or pleasure should be resisted, for all living creatures share this common planet for lifelong harmless living in harmony with nature. Nobody has right to destroy life which is precious to all. Here, an incident of the past can be cited as mentioned in Matakabhata Jataka [8]:

“In times past, Brahmin, I, like you was a Brahmin versed in the mystic texts of the Vedas, and I, to offer a feast for the dead, killed a goat for my offering. All through killing that single goat, I have had my head cut off five hundred times all but one. This is my five hundredth and last birth; and I laughed aloud when I thought that this very day I should be freed from my misery. On the other hand, I wept when I thought how, whilst I, who for killing a goat had been doomed to lose my head five hundred times, was today being freed from my misery, you as a penalty for killing me, would be doomed to lose your head, like me, five hundred times. Thus it was compassion for you that I wept.”

Lack of respect for others and overriding concern for one makes one steal other's properties, materials; kill for food or pleasure etc. But it is not realised that such a habit in the long run makes one lazy, looked upon disrespectfully by others, always being in fear of being caught, loss of friendship and so on. Sexual misconduct is one such malady that inflicts us severely and takes away our precious time spent on useless activity which leads to mental and physical agony, fights and misunderstanding between the concerned persons. Lies are important ingredients of such activities and so much so that it is very difficult to take oneself out of it, leading to misery, conflicts, sorrow that continues unabated. One gets addicted to alcohol and other intoxicants in such a situation in an effort to get rid of the malady one is solely responsible for. The five precepts are the minimum basic requirements for each individual to comply with. In the lights of these precepts one should keep evaluating oneself on daily basis. One should continuously keep sufficient checks on oneself as explained by Punke [9] in his article on Honesty:

“However, through escape mechanisms, unanalytical responses, and other ways of yielding to immediate and transient satisfactions at the expense of the personal discipline and self-criticism necessary to pick apart one's best current efforts in the hope of possible improvement, one can gradually build up a system of self-deceptions and habits of dishonesty concerning himself.”

Armed with these facts spelled out in details of what one is, the next step is to work upon them in the right direction so that the good qualities are preserved and further strengthened and the bad qualities are suppressed and eliminated during the process. Honesty and Equanimity reinforce each other. Buddha, in an earlier incarnation [Uarga Jataka], displayed exemplary conduct of equanimity when his only son died before him while he was ploughing the fields. One should always keep in mind the impermanence of the body i.e. death can strike at any moment while living and one should perform all actions and duties with equanimity. It is an ancient wisdom that one should spend a few minutes before going to sleep every day and ponder over the good and bad deeds committed in the day and subsequently resolve to reduce the bad deeds and increase the good ones on the following day. The self appraisal process when carried over a long period of time may culminate into actions that one should take to improve upon oneself for the one's own welfare and also that of the society. The very purpose of self appraisal is to assess one's qualities and thereafter make appropriate modifications for the good of the individual and the society at large.

IV. Conclusion

Self management is an important step in any endeavour. Honesty in this process is an important ingredient. Honesty leads to strengthening of other qualities including sincerity, truthfulness, kindness, trustworthiness and loyalty. The three characteristics of life and five precepts as promulgated by Buddha have been explained as building stones to help oneself in the endeavour to manage oneself efficiently and peacefully leading to the welfare of the society.

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Abbreviation:

SN: Samyutta Nikaya (The Middle Length Discourses delivered by Buddha)