

Leadership

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The leaders of society have the subtlest duty in life. They take upon themselves the difficult and subtle duty of guiding the masses. They should be able to work always with inspiration and dedication. Even to such dedicated men of action, Lord Krishna puts in a word of warning so that they may not bring about harm through blind over enthusiasm.

A society is not built overnight through magic incantations. Time and tradition alone can build the strength and beauty of society. It functions under the influences of the world-pattern around and the personality plan within. This should not be all of a sudden stemmed in its flow and violently diverted into some new direction of action and purpose. The art of guiding mankind without disrupting the existing harmony is well brought out by Lord Krishna in his note of warning to the leaders in all fields. A true leader should fall in line with the generation by setting an example himself, and slowly and steadily guiding his generation to act in the right direction.

“Let no wise man unsettle the mind of the ignorant people who are attached to action; let him engage them in all actions, himself fulfilling them with devotion” (Bhagavad Gita 3.26). It is dangerous to unsettle the faith of the generation all of a sudden. Violent revolutions deform the character of individuals. The world’s history is not wanting in examples of leaders who, in the excitement and over enthusiasm of following newly discovered ideals, have miscalculated the strength of the masses, and have consequently found themselves crushed by the avalanche of emotions and passions already let loose by them in the masses.

Hence, Lord Krishna says the best way to bring about a renaissance is by the leaders themselves expressing the divinity in them and thus attracting followers to them. By precept and practice, the masses should be gradually guided toward the right path.

In case one wants to be a just leader and bless his generation, his first attempt should be to cultivate equanimity and poise within himself—qualities that will raise him above the dualities in nature, such as, honor and dishonor, likes and dislikes, love and hatred.

Such a karma yogî crosses over and reaches beyond the shackles of the guḍas of sattva, rajas, and tamas (three textures of thought: serenity, activity, and inactivity). From such a noble person emanate the divine qualities of harmlessness, truth, renunciation, fortitude, and so on. Having transcended the

dualities, he is equally disposed toward friends and enemies, the indifferent and the hateful, the righteous and the unrighteous.

When such noble leaders come forward to act in a spirit of cooperation and self-dedication, they release the community not only from poverty and sorrows, but also from ignorance and superstition. To arrive at such a balance within ourselves and work in a spirit of dedication, we have to necessarily free ourselves from the attachment to objects around. “The same in honor and dishonor, the same to friend and foe, abandoning all undertakings, he is said to have crossed beyond the guḍas” (Bhagavad Gita 14.25).

As a leader, even after entering the vaster field of work, one should not neglect one’s obligatory duties. Many are such duties—those demanded of his social status, domestic situation, and so on. Lord Krishna points out to Arjuna the noble life of King Janaka, who set up a glorious example for his own generation to follow. Because “whatever a great man does, that other men also do (imitate). Whatever he sets up as the standard is that which the world follows” (Bhagavad Gita 3.21). The leader should keep this in mind at all times and should engage in perfect actions that are well worth imitating. Illiterate masses who listen to the thundering eloquence of leaders on platforms may not often understand the full import of their ideals, but they feel and appreciate the behavior and attitude of that leader in society. These millions copy the decorum set as a standard by the leaders—not by their words, but by their actions; and we know that these millions constitute the country.

Thus, the rebuilding of a society or a country can be achieved only through the integrated characters of its leaders.

The true and vibrant personality, capable of such achievements, has been beautifully depicted by Lord Krishna:

“Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in the yoga of knowledge, giving alms, control of the senses, sacrifice, study of the scriptures, straightforwardness, nonviolence, truth, absence of anger, renunciation, peacefulness, absence of crookedness, compassion to beings, non-covetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickle-mindedness, vigor, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, absence of hatred, absence of pride—these belong to the one born for the divine estate, O Bhârata” (Bhagavad Gita 16.1-3).

When, after due consideration, one has taken the leader's role, one's first allegiance should be to the ideals for which one stands. The ideals should be such that they inspire the masses to sink their mutual differences, work together, strive with enthusiasm, and bring out dynamism in their endeavors to build unity and harmony. Amid the apparent diversity of work performed by each, there should not be any discordant notes. Each action should be so perfect that it brings in more and more peace and harmony around. Only such actions can constitute right service and come to reflect true dedication.

Through such actions, one gets rid of the accumulated burden of vâsanâs within. Through one's constant attunement with the higher and the nobler, one's personality is chastened. And such a polished personality is the right vehicle to work in the world of change and endless problems, achieving success and happiness for generations.