

The Outlook of Duty

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Yoga tells us that our problems are not because of people, things, conditions or the world outside, but because of our reactions to things. Life is action, and every moment we are involved in action of some sort.

A dictionary defines 'duty' as, "That which one is morally or legally obligated to". Once we see what has to be done as duty, it seems that there is great relief from all the inner anxieties that surround and thwart action. One may be called to give testimony or a deposition in court on a decision where there is some sort of personal interest; there may be some turmoil until one takes the oath to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It seems that this sets one free immediately and the clouds of conflict are at once set aside, as one's duty now is simply to tell the truth when questioned.

It is the sense of duty that enables soldiers in times of extreme adversity to answer the call of the moment to the utmost. Much later, society recognizes this as something heroic and lauds the action and hero in uniform. When many of these heroes are questioned later about what led them to attempt and do such acts of heroism, their reply is usually, "I was just doing what was needed to be done at that time and anyone else would have done the same thing." This is quite a remarkable statement, as they never felt their acts were extraordinary at all but total response to the moment.

We see the bar raised by athletes who, seeing their teams in a precarious situation or with victory in the balance, are able to rise to unimaginable levels of performance. Here also, recognition comes after the performance. While pushing themselves to perform beyond present levels, it is the call of duty—that which has to be done—that is the only spring for action. Success, recognition, failure or risk do not enter into the picture at all, and thus the athlete is free to unleash his potential to its highest levels.

Doctors, firemen, relief and aid workers and many more have only been able to attain higher reaches of performance when they were free of all thought, including motive, by seeing what needed to be done as a duty.

Duty is not something you have to do or something that is expected, as all soldiers are expected to be brave and valorous, and professional athletes are expected to be star performers, and firemen are also expected to answer the call of duty, but we know that this is the exception in spite of things.

Expectations or obligations have nothing to do with stellar levels of performance, as it is always the individual who responds totally to the present, free of all expectations including self-expectations when greatness is realized. Greatness cannot be sought; it comes when there is no seeking, when there is just total response to the need of the moment. Expectations mostly deliver mediocrity at best, as the motivation is external and not a need felt by oneself—in every cell of one's being—to respond. When this deep need is felt, the whole being responds, and endless resources of energy and ability are made instantly available to meet the need. Note, that it is not the need of the person—but the need of the situation.

Duty is not a mechanical process of blind response where one becomes hard, so to say, and does something in a cold manner by numbing out his or her feelings at the moment. No calculation or adjustment is possible when responding as duty—you just do what needs to be done. If we are sitting in the basement of some old building and the roof starts to crumble, it is the immediate response of those who are able to free themselves from concern about personal safety who alone can do what is best for the situation— “this has to be done”. There is never any warming up to get the adrenaline flowing or psyching up to gather the rays in total response, and it is not a blind response either as it seems to happen with tremendous precision—a level probably not possible under optimal conditions.

When you introduce ‘optimal conditions’, all the excess baggage and its strings of motive and agenda bog one down instantly. Optimal conditions are not conducive to peak performance. It has always been total disregard for oneself or motive that has allowed the soul to rise into action and draw instantly from deeper reservoirs of energy for what has to be done. Optimal conditions make one lethargic, weak and mediocre at best.

The security of comfort is a blanket of weakness. All who have achieved the high peaks in any field have exerted without fanfare or personal regard. Recognition in all its forms catches up to one later, but the steady over-performer sees this as a trap to be carefully avoided. He knows very well that reaching heights is impossible because of any demands or expectations of others and that the entire being will need to rise again—because it needs to happen.

These super heroes are super not so much because of what they do but the unique way in which they respond—totally. All of them rise into action to do what needs to be done. You cannot classify them as introverts or extroverts—they are in a class by themselves. The call to do what needs to be done is felt in their entire being, and every cell answers this call at the same time. Duty sets them free—free from expectations, motives, agenda or personal concern—and greatness greets them warmly as they respond.

Responses are not answers to the situation but part of the situation. The left leg buckles and one is about to fall—the hands immediately protect one from the danger of falling. Total response is

only possible when you are one with the situation. That which raises the stakes has to answer its own call.

When you have a difficult problem to solve, a way is seen when one sees *from within* the problem itself. When we misplace or lose something, all the frantic searching seems to stir the mind into further anxiety, but a little relaxation and reentry into the situation mentally will instantly reveal the otherwise unobvious.

The outlook of duty is not for situations of eminent danger or challenge but can be a vision of life. The Bhagavad Gita tells us that we only have the right to duty, never to the fruits thereof. Here is a master key which instantly liberates one from the excess weight that thwarts performance by weaknesses of all sorts and floods one with all that is needed—that which needs to be done—not that which ‘I’ must do. This ‘I’ can only bumble and falter in pitiable attempts which can never reach the higher rungs of the ladder.

Duty as the way to live is doing what needs to be done in each moment—without all that hinders, weakens, and thereby loses opportunity upon opportunity—waiting for the right conditions. The outlook of duty is the right condition from which any peak can be scaled—if you only will. It is not some macho outlook of ‘tough men’ but, on the contrary, requires an absence of self-concern—which is humility—and the spontaneous embrace of the situation at hand, rising supremely in answer.

Duty is the true response to life and this truth sets you free instantly. In duty, there is no longer a shrewd, calculating and utterly petty ‘me or mine first’, as these do not exist in any situation. ‘I’ and ‘me’ are mines in the mind that explode on contact. When the field of action is free of mines of selfishness, the field is wide open and what needs to happen can happen.

Great strength is released to those who feel one with all situations and can respond as an integral part of the situation from moment to moment. You can never achieve any level of greatness from outside things—you have to get down and dirty as they say—get into the thick of things. The thick of things rises with answers and solutions that come through you. It is said that the solution always rides on the belly of the problem—close to the ground. When you are one with pain, there is no difficulty. It is the same when one is in freezing cold—it is miserable as long as you fight it. Once you let the anxiety drop, everything seems quite tolerant, even enjoyable.

We have somehow come to believe and feel that having the ‘me’ in the equation of action is the only way to make sure ‘my’ interests are best taken care of. This is a fallacy—just not true! The reverse is what works best. Learning to do what needs to be done in every situation—whether it be at home, school, work or in meditation—allows one to give oneself totally to the task. Carrots have never enticed greatness, as the motivation is external. For total response, one has to be one with the situation where there is neither external nor internal, the situation or ‘me’. Something needs to be done—do it.

Yoga teaches us that it is this living, breathing response which frees us from inner weakness—the self-centeredness that binds. The strength and confidence that invigorates a dutiful being are not like those of the showoffs craving for attention. They are free of this vanity, as he is one with situations, whereas the shrewd cat of vanity finds no place to insert its claws.

Lord Krishna tells us in the first verse of the Sixth Chapter of the Bhagavad Gita which is titled, 'The Yoga of Meditation', "He who performs his bounden duty without depending on the fruits of his actions, he is a sannyasi and a yogi; not he who is without fire and without action." Sannyasis are commonly called renunciates and monks. A suggested meaning for sannyasi is one who has renounced the feeling of 'I-ness'. An etymological root of the word monk is from the Greek, '*monachos*' or single, solitary—one with all and one in all.

He who is one with all and one in all alone can live life as duty, and the converse is also true: "One who lives life as duty is one with all". This has nothing to do with being cold, clammy or insensitive, but everything to do with being fully sensitive. Selfishness can never allow for a total response even in moments of danger, because this little 'I' may not have figured out what to do with itself and its feelings. The spirit of duty is the spirit of yoga—yoga itself. One is never separate or outside of anything; one is always with all and everything and there is never any inner conflict or confusion.

One is fully sensitive and ever alert. There are situations and there are the best responses—not by the dutiful but by the situation itself, which the dutiful are at one with. Situations are their best response. Sage Patanjali tells us in the Yoga Sutras about action being that which has to happen—not something that has to be done but something that has to happen.

When you stand outside of situations, you remain outside—in the cold. When you are one with situations, you are not inside them but are one with them, and therefore there is no inside or outside. There is some fire—and it is this fire that gives the necessary heat for that which has to happen.

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