

Facing Life Squarely

Swami Suryadevananda

We live in two worlds at the same time—the world outside and the world inside. The world outside, which is common to all, is not the cause of our difficulties.

But there is a whole universe inside—our creation—and this is not only the cause of our difficulties but—it is difficulty itself. I call this the inner universe—*uni*-verse—as it is *uni*-que to one. We have the final say, and our *verse*-ion is mostly correct.

When things do not work out, it is the fault of the world outside and we are ready to find cause or give blame. When things work out, we are quick to merge cause and credit and try to be modest about it which is a way to add more value by vanity.

As long as we live divided, we will always be our own victims, as we not only fashion our circumstances but we *are* our circumstances. What is created in the mind is created in us, of us and by us, and we cannot stand apart from it. All creations of the mind are fragments of the totality and hence, many sizes down.

We somehow come to feel that our inner world is good, healthy and safe, but actually it is the exact opposite. It is not good, as it is not real and does not match its real counterparts. It is not healthy, as we live with self-ascribed values that change to our convenience. It is not safe because when things change in the world, we hold on to inner thought-fragments which are extremely fragile, to say the least.

We can never realize true potential living in an artificial world. To reach great heights, we must climb *real* ground and this means facing reality all the time. Words of 'I', 'my' and 'ours' are not reality, as they exist as expanses of quicksand-like thought in one's own mind. The struggle for 'quality of life' is the struggle for 'our own world'—a world of our own making. Affluence seems to provide the means to fashion this inner-world with an arrangement of physical things. These things may have no value to some, whereas they may be most wonderful to the beholder.

Why is there a need for this artificial inner world when reality is in front of us every moment? This is not to say that one should not be successful—far from it, as real success does not mean becoming artificial but more natural, more whole. I remember a wonderful cartoon, "The only problem with the rat-race is that even if you win, you are still a rat". Sometime later, I stumbled on another that seemed to be a follow-up, "Just when you think you're winning in the rat-race, the price of cheese goes up". Why can't we do our best without the race or becoming rats?

Why can't we just do our best without this competition thing? When the stakes are raised in competing, as they mostly are, we have too much to lose and can often compromise in ways that may not happen if wisdom had the wheel.

To do our best and be our best without the need for competition, outcome or recognition—simply because it is what must happen—allows us to give all our attention and energies to the task on hand, and this is the way of real success in any endeavor. I've heard it said that there must be some motive to goad us on. Really? If motive seems shaky in being realized or not felt worth our while, effort will surely be thwarted. Sincere hard effort is the very substance from which our success is made. It is not the raw material but success itself, just as the pot is the clay that has been painstakingly fashioned.

This approach requires inner strength of self-control, as otherwise habit will pull, being the path of least resistance. Discipline is the refining fire which turns talent into ability. Real success is success over the inner world, and self-control or discipline is a bright lamp on the path which makes sure that inner success or evolution is never compromised.

What we do then becomes a catalyst for inner evolution instead of the other way where one harnesses all they are capable of for the highest bidder. Wisdom takes the driver's seat in the journey of life, but this takes attentive effort. New habits have to be made, and they take time because the old grooves are deep. New habits are fragile in the beginning and must be protected, just as new crops or a newborn calf are. Even the sturdiest of giant redwood trees had their days as delicate saplings earlier. Just as one in many saplings turns out to be a full-blown giant redwood tree, so does one in many who strive turn out to stand on the peaks of inner perfection and feel one with the grandeur of his surroundings.

What you do not use, you lose—this is true for self-control and discipline too. Just as weak muscles are developed by little exercises each day, so it is with inner strength. Every act becomes a little exercise in strengthening the will and moral fabric.

I read someplace, "The more I realize what great things come from little things, the more I realize that there are no little things." Growth or development is total and everything is equally important, as all are means to the same result. The carpenter fashions furniture through many steps, some requiring cruder effort and some fine finishing touches—none of these is more important than the other and each step has a master craftsman's full attention.

In the journey towards perfection, you are the master craftsman, the wood from which the masterpiece must be fashioned and the tools as well. Each chipping is a chip away at inessentials to reveal the beauty that is already seen in the mind's eye. The lamp of inner focus is powered by the current of sincerity and shines brightly upon the many imperfections that rise when old ways try to steer effort. These include selfishness, vanity, laziness, worry, mind-wandering, lack of purpose, anger and such. These are not human weaknesses but weaknesses we have grown

to accept. They can be snapped and rent asunder—only if you will. Discovery and transformation are the alpha-omega of success and this operation is not a two-step process, but one unbroken flow of unwavering effort.

Every moment is a moment of discovery and transformation in the ascent of the self to the heights of perfection. Each moment is lived and guided by this single purpose, and the periods between events fade as one abides in the unbroken spirit that begins to soar high. No room for regrets or useless worry as everything is done perfectly—not perfection as a result of action but perfection *through* action. The journey is the destination.

When the rear-view mirrors of the past and future are dismantled, one can give himself or herself fully to the real present and give full attention to both inner and outer seamlessly. Victory is not the elusive pot of gold at the end of the rainbow but the immediate harvest each step—of each planting. The journey is the reward.

suryadevananda.org