
The Inevitability of Action



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Nowadays under the modern system of education, when a young man comes out of the university, there seems to be this misconception in him that higher the "standard of living", the less should a man work in the world outside. Thus mathematically, higher the "standard of living", according to this misconceived notion, the less the work, and ultimately what would be the highest standard of living? No work at all. So, no work, maximum recreation, all sensual enjoyment, living 365 days on holiday! This is the highest standard of living. This seems to be the conception of our youngsters today when they enter into the field of action.

There seems to be an unhealthy competition today among the workers. I have been mixing with the secretariat workers all over the country and I have noted that among them there is almost a competition like this, "How much work did you do today?" "Three letters!" "Three letters you did! I only did one letter." Thus the former decides that if the latter had done one letter, "Dekho (see), tomorrow I will not do even one." Thus there is a competition in the wrong direction today because of this false notion. "I give my proprietor the minimum and eke out of him the maximum."

This is nothing but a reaction.

When the foreigner was in the country, under the medieval economic set-up of this country, the kings, the landlords and the proprietors, a few in numbers, learnt the art of squeezing the maximum out of ordinary people and arrogated all to themselves. Now, therefore, we find this reaction in the society that the average man or the middle class man wants to get everything from the rich or the government without returning anything to the government or to the proprietor. This is a natural social incident, which happens inevitably in the context of our history, emerging from slavery to freedom.

But in this context, at this moment, when our nation's progress is at stake, if the young men who have come now, who are no more the children of slaves, but who are the proprietors of a new chance given to them by history, want to make their country and their life progressive, there must be a new philosophy of action in their hearts. Thus after so many years of freedom, slowly the government and the industrialists have started realizing this, and great men, specialists from America have come to the country, and they give to the people in the country, the workers as well the clerical staff, the ideas of the sanctity of work, etc., as if it is not in our culture or in our scriptures. It is already there, but the 'Pundit-class' (educated class) was not bringing it out in the context of an independent country, panting to build up its destiny.

When we look at life, it is clear that if action is stopped, the organism is dead. Think for a moment please! You are all alive, I am also alive. The world belongs to the living. To the dead there is neither a constitution nor progress nor industrialization, nor wealth, nor happiness – there is nothing. The destiny of a nation belongs to the living generation. We are all alive. What do we mean by "we are alive?" Life is the most sacred wealth that you and I have got – we are ready to do anything to maintain that life; we worked or we studied in our childhood, we struggled hard for a job and we got the job, we are working from morning to evening now – all for maintaining our lives. Life is a common denominator. There is no question of "haves" or "have-nots" as far as life is concerned. Life is for the rich, life is for the poor, life is for the employer and for the employees. Life is for the successful and for the failure. Everyone has got life and has an equal share and this we sacredly guard for our selves. This is our precious wealth. But **what exactly is life?** Very rarely we are instructed in this either by our parents or by our elders or by our university education. We are very rarely given to thinking about it.

The great *acaryas* of the past also contemplated about it and they discussed this matter with their disciples. What exactly is life, then?

Life is a fascinating power, which expresses itself through the mighty man as well as the scoundrel. This expression is common to all of us.

What exactly is life? The teacher of the *Upanishads*, instead of defining life, asked the disciples to watch and observe a dead body. We call it dead when all the activities in it have ended. The dead body is no more physically perceiving anything, mentally cannot have any impressions or feelings. Intellectually it cannot think. All its organs have stopped, the heart is no more thudding, and the physical structure is no more functioning within. At that time we say that the organism is dead. Whether it is a human being, an animal or a plant, an organism is dead when it no more responds to the world outside.

There is a plant – I water it regularly, but still not a leaf or flower comes out on it. Then, the plant must be dead. Why? Because it is not responding to the external stimuli. If a dog is lying down and I throw stones at it, and yet it is neither getting up nor barking, then we say it is a dead dog. Why? Because it is not responding to the pain caused by me. I call my father – I hug him, I love him, but he is not responding to any emotions of the other world. Naturally we say the individual is dead. Whether an individual or a single unicellular organism, if in none of them there is any activity, then the organism is dead.

Activity is the insignia of life.

You and I, when we are living cannot but be active. So long as we are living, we will have to act, for, life pulsating through the body is activity in the outer world. There is a fool, an idler. We ask him, "What are you doing, my boy?" He says, "Nothing." When he says, "Nothing," the answer does not mean that he is dead, but it means that he is not doing anything good with his activity either for the society or for his family or for himself because action must necessarily come out from him just as fragrance from the rose. The rose cannot stop its fragrance spreading out. If it is a rose, it must have the fragrance of the rose. If it is water, there must be fluidity in it. It is its characteristic, it is its nature. Similarly, you and I, until we are placed in our burial ground, will have to act whether we like it or not.

Now the question is, since actions are flowing out from every living man until he dies, how can they be organized, altered or disciplined in order that these actions, necessarily and inevitably coming out from him, would bring about happiness all around in the community and a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction to himself in his own bosom? This is what is called "The Art of Action".

Action is inevitable because it is the signature of life. Life expresses itself in action, as death does in inaction. But actions may vary, as they do vary, from man to man.

A laborer working in the field may be perspiring and sweating. A poet working may not be perspiring or sweating; he is seemingly from the laborer's standpoint, not working at all. From the standpoint of the poet, the scientist is wasting public money. From the scientist's standpoint, an ordinary thinker is wasting his time. From all their points of view, the Buddha under the tree is a waster and leech upon society, sucking the blood or wealth of society, an idler etc. Each one may point out to the other and say that he is an idler, but each one knows vigorously he himself is active.

It is said that a great painter was once upon a time sitting down under a wayside pool and throwing stones into the water and watching the play of the light and shade upon the ripples. An ordinary man, moving along the road, carrying the milk from his cow-shed to the nearby town to sell the milk, jealously looked at this man and said, "This fool is sitting idle from morning till evening. What a dirty fellow! I have already put in eight hours of work and I cannot make both ends meet." He murmured like this and went to the town. There he sold the milk, and as he returned with an empty can on his shoulders, he counted the money. He said, "This much for the cows, this much for the fodder, this much for the family." And he sighed that there was no reserve to keep for his old age. He

was disgusted with life, and at that time, lo! Do you know what he saw? The same fellow was sitting in the same pose, continuing his stone-throwing into the same pond, with one hand biting a pair of sandwiches. The poor milkman stood there and he could no more control himself and just like any of our local socialist or communist followers he stood there, and a few more persons joined him, and started howling, "If there is a government in this country, such a rascal as this must be shot dead because he has not been doing anything at all and I do not know what is the system of economics in this country that such an idler in the society has got the sandwiches, while I have not eaten at all from morning till evening. I have been working and I have not got anything for me to eat. What an injustice!" Poor villager, he knew not that the person against whom he had complained against was no less a person than Medici, the great painter, who as a result of observing these waves, reproduced them on the canvas, and there even today we can see the immortal picture of Madonna and the Child, the Mother Mary with the Christ child, sitting near a water pool, a lotus therein slightly moving in the breeze. He wanted to capture the play of light and shade on the waves, so that he could arrest them and capture them on to the canvas, and he was most vigorously working in his own way, but the others thought that he was idling away his time. It is that man, the so-called idler who produced the immortal picture of Madonna and Child, while the milkman who is supposed to have worked and toiled so honestly for society, died like a bug in any third-class compartment of the Indian Railways! He died, leaving nothing for posterity to remember him by.

Everybody must work, but what matters is how to work, in what way one should work! Being in the sun for the whole day alone is not work. That is one method of working. Another man may be in an air-conditioned room for twelve hours, but he too works in his own way. But what is the type of work that we do? What type of work can we do and how the maximum can be brought out from ourselves? We will go into them into the following talks.

So long as we are living, we cannot but act. When we are looking at it from the historical point of view, we find the old barbarian going about with a stone in his hand to destroy animals to eat them for his own belly's sake, thus he was working. The people of the Middle Ages were also working. Today in this age of the atom bomb and the hydrogen bomb, we too are working. This work, we find at the same time, is not of the same caliber, but differs from individual to individual.

The great *rishis* said that the type and the quality of work that we pour out of ourselves could be classified under three different categories. The first of them, they said, is the lowest type, and since I do not have a proper word in English, let us call it "labor." When I say labor, I am not in any way bringing disgrace to ordinary labor. It is not in that sense of the word that I am talking. By labor I do not mean wearing shorts and *banian*, and working with the spanner and screwdriver in hand. It is not that labor I am talking about. Give me enough time to explain,

Ask a laborer, "Why are you working?" Then you will understand what is the quality of that particular man's activity. If you ask a man who is working, "Why are you working?" And the man answers, "I am working so that I may get my wages." The man who is thus working in society only for the sake of wages, only for the sake of pay, only for the sake of commission, the man who is working in the world only for profit, is called a laborer. A minister may be a laborer, a Chief Justice may be a laborer, one of the greatest men of a country or a politician may be a laborer, if he is putting forth his intelligence, mind and body to the society only with the idea, "I will aggrandize more and more income." You ask him, "Why do you want wages?" He has no greater motive than "I may feather my house beautifully, for the sake of my wife and children. I want this income so that I can keep the wolf away from the door. I want it only for my own pleasure." The man who is self-centered is working only for the profit that comes to him. With that profit he is not

thinking of starting a hospital or doing any good to society, but he wants only to aggrandize and give it intact to his wife and children at home. If that is the low ambition with which a man is pouring out his energy in the world outside, the sweating man falls under the classification of 'laborer.'

In the same work that a laborer is doing and in the same field, there can be another man who is not a laborer at all. In a field where a great man of the stature of Mahatma Gandhi is gaining the greatest achievement, in the same political field there can be a man who is only a laborer. I hope I have conveyed the idea. It is not the work that you do that matters. It may be scavenging work; it may be the Chief Minister's or Prime Minister's job. It is not the work that gives you the dignity and glory in society, but it is how you do it, and if you are doing it with an idea, "I may get out of society something and with that I shall benefit myself and enjoy myself in society." If this is the self-centered limited point of view, you may be a scientist, you may be a great thinker, you may be a poet, you may be a writer, you may be intellectually the greatest genius of the country, and you are only a laborer from the philosophical standpoint.

The second variety in contrast to the laborer is called the "worker." You will wonder, "Laborer and worker", where is the difference after all? I will bring home to you the difference. "There goes a political worker," we generally hear, but have you ever heard, "A political laborer is going?" Have you ever heard, "A religious laborer is going, a social laborer is going. Social labor welfare?" You do not hear so. "Social laborer", we do not hear. "What are you doing?" "Nowadays I am doing social labor." "Social labor" we do not say. We say, "I am a social worker. I am a political worker. I am a religious worker," and so on. Now then, why do we say "worker" in contrast to "laborer?" There is a certain difference.

To a worker if you ask, "Oh, political worker, why are you sweating like this?" He will say, "That is because I want to bring something about in society." "What is it that you want to bring about?" He will not say, "I will get so much profit". His eyes are not on the profit. No doubt he wants profit. Besides that, he wants success in society.

If you ask a worker why he is working, he will say, "I want success, therefore I am working hard." The laborer is asked, "Why are you laboring?" He says, "Wages." The worker wants success. "Success in what?" Every worker has a picture of an ideal heaven, of a perfect society. The idea may be a socialistic pattern or a communistic pattern or a divine pattern, but he has got a picture of an ideal and he is invariably struggling hard to bring about that ideal, as an actual fact around him, in his own lifetime, if possible. The socialist wants the socialistic pattern in society before he dies. The communist wants to bring the communistic pattern. Thus each one has an ideal in his mind, and he struggles to make the ideal an actual fact. Such men are called "workers."

The worker is working, not for mere profit, nor for the wages. What he wants is an idealistic pattern, which he has in his intellect, which he wants to bring about and work out in society. To the extent the ideal is worked out in society, to that extent he is happy and he says, "I have succeeded."

Thus a laborer wants wages, so that he may be happy with his wife and children. A worker wants success for the ideal he wants to bring about in society.

The third are the rare ones. The laborers are many in the world, the workers are less in number, but the third are very few indeed in the world at a given period of history, and they are called "Men of Achievement." Thus men of labor, men of work and men of achievement, is the three-fold classification if the *rishis*.

Ask the man of achievement, "What is it you want in the world? Why are you working? O Buddha, why did you work? O Christ, why did you work? O Mohammed, why did you

move from place to place, preaching against all odds?" Surely they were working in the world not for wages, not for anything else, but they must necessarily work because they feel such an urge that they must work and they work for fulfillment.

Such people work in the world, not for profit, not for success, but with a feeling of *krtakrtyata*, with a sense, "I have done the right thing to be done," and irrespective of the age, irrespective of whether we are going to recognize them in their lifetime or not. They are the men of achievement. All that a man of achievement wants is that secret joy in himself, that sense of fulfillment, "I did what best I could do in that matter." Whether others recognize it or not, they do not care at all and invariably generations crush them down in all periods of history. Christ was destroyed. Almost all great men from ancient times up to our own Mahatma Gandhi were mercilessly murdered. The world did crush them out, but they died most happily because of the sense of overflowing joy that comes from the thought, As long as I live in the world, I did the right thing, and got my generation to do the right thing. Whether others valued it or not, it is their destiny indeed, but I have done my job as best as I could." In that ecstatic joy they invariably die. All such men are indeed called "Men of Fulfillment."

The men of fulfillment, when they worked in the world outside, did not work for feathering their own home for a more comfortable life, nor did they work in the world outside for bringing a heaven upon earth, but they worked among men, shoulder to shoulder. By practice and precept, they tried to lead mankind to live the ideal life. More often than not, such men were persecuted either by the state or the society, for they were too idealistic for their age. Against all such obstacles, the man of fulfillment lived on, inspiring others by his joyous way of life and thus brought about a new movement of moral upheaval in the country. Thus the morality, the culture and the civilization of the society always rose up because of the work of this mighty man in his short span of life. A Christ only lived 30 years in the world. A Vivekananda lived only about 37 years in the world and Sankara had a span of only 32 years. All of them gave a push and fillip to the ideal, a life that they themselves lived and experienced not merely conceived and talked about.

Thus all men of achievement are not mere laborers nor are they workers, but they are seekers of fulfillment. By living in the world, in the society, the idealistic life, in spite of the fact that the people around them were not living nor willing to live the life-ideal, they thrilled and inspired their generation, generating in them awe and a reverence for the perfect life. Such ideal men alone have crow-barred the world to a higher level, to a greater consciousness of the moral principle.

Today we hear from the most educated people and the great workers in the secretariat, "Swamiji we cannot afford to be honest in the secretariat." "How sad my boy!" Of course I know the difficulty. It needs a hero to create beauty in the country or progress in the country. It is not for the coward. If you are not ready to make sacrifices, no country can come forward. You cannot expect a miracle to happen, a great angel to come down to the country and suddenly with a touch and magic power, make the entire country glow up.

It is by individual sacrifices alone that this is possible. Everywhere in all fields, political, economic and cultural, progress has taken place in the world only because of such sacrifices. If you, a few people, after realizing the glow of life and "Right way of living" and the "Art of existence" were to enter into the secretariat and live an ideal moral standard of living, finding fulfillment in work itself, not caring for petty earnings, I tell you that you will be inspiring the others there to know this new way of life. Until you are ready to make that sacrifice, the throttling, blood-curdling, vicious circle of corruption that has come into our government cannot be removed. You cannot solve the problem by saying, "What can we do? The whole system is like that Swamiji!" As long as you remain there saying that the system is like this, do you think that the poor laborer, the poor

taxpayer in the village is held responsible? Can he do anything to improve the organization? It rests upon our own shoulders to improve our own houses. Your neighbor is not going to come to improve relations between you and your wife and children. Each one has to understand and live the right life in the home, and the home is beautified. Since we have taken upon ourselves this great mission in life and have entered the secretariat, it is necessary that each one must understand that in our little social status, little field, whether at home or in our society or in the institution where we are working we must have at least the integrity in ourselves, so that we will be able to work in the world outside with a sense of achievement rather than for a mere flippant passing honor or success or for a little more money in our pocket.

Thus there are three types of activity in this world, coming from three different types of people. The laborer is the first category. We call him a laborer, who is working in the world just for wages. And what does he want the wages for? For fattening his own body, for giving comfort to his wife and children. Beyond that, even to help a neighbor is impossible for him. What he wants is wages. Even if this idea comes to the greatest man in the country, he is only a laborer. Our respect for him immediately ceases. The nation no longer looks up to such a man. The nation no longer looks up to that group or company. No more can they lead because we understand the hollowness of their activity.

The second variety is those who struggle hard in the world outside because every one of them has great enthusiasm and great vision in life. They are ready to starve and ready to suffer. The spiritual missionaries, the great cultural thinkers are all struggling to bring the ideals they have got into the world.

The best among them are indeed very, very rare. They do not generally come in every generation. It is they who give a fillip to the general cultural beauty of society and they crowbar the entire generation, lift the entire society to a higher standard of life, a higher dignity of morality, a greater virtue of life. Such mighty men are called saints and seers or *Avatara Purusas* in our country, great prophets in foreign countries or incarnations of great virtues and values. They are called so, not because they worked in the world or because they had a great party, but because they lived the ideal life. Each one inspired the others even after the body was annihilated. The fragrance of their thoughts, the might and glory of their ideals gather new momentum as the years roll by. The more the generations come after the date of their death, the more seems to be the compelling charm and beauty in which they lived. Christ died two thousand years ago and yet you find that the farther you may move from the ideal that he lived for, and he met joyously his own death at the hands of that generation, His glory is becoming more and more compelling in the world. 2,500 years ago the Buddha died. The more we move away historically from Him, the more detachedly we can experience what He did, and we appreciate the Prince of Compassion more and more.

No doubt if there were newspaper men at the time of the Buddha or Christ both of them would have been given only a corner on the eighth page of the newspaper saying that the criminal Christ also has been murdered, or that the Buddha died as an unknown fellow during his retreat. "He was, once upon a time, the great prince Siddhartha, but the fool left everything like a stupid person, went into retreat, begged in the streets of Sarnath where he lived until he died, and 1000 disciples of his are knocking about all over. He was only a manufacturer of beggars in the country." That would have been the report of our own local representative of the newspaper, if there were newspapers at that time. They never issued statements to the press or held conference of the press. They silently, quietly and secretly worked in their own villages, and in their own streets. Like Socrates, calling on the villagers around and singing about the new vision of thought, they lifted their generation to a higher level.

In our cities we see the sight of people going about the coffee houses and having a jolly good time. Jolly good time cannot be had if jolly good money is not there and jolly good money to all the millions of people can never be given by any government.

Everybody in the secretariat has told me, "Swamiji, it is very difficult." "What is very difficult?" I asked. "To make both ends meet", is the reply. I said, "Why? You have been getting a good salary now." "Swamiji, you do not know, nowadays it is very difficult to make both ends meet." Now when I heard this from a clerk, I thought probably the poor fellow was poorly paid, and therefore his answer. I went to the upper division clerk, and he too told me that it was "very difficult to make both ends meet." So I went to the superintendent and he also said, "Swamiji, these days you do not know, it is very difficult to make both ends meet." The deputy secretary, under-secretary, the secretary, the minister, the chief minister, go to anyone, every one says, "It is very difficult to make both ends meet."

Now what is the matter? Why is this so? The more you get, the more difficulties arise to make both ends meet. It is all because our stomach has got a knack; it looks for growing farther than our belt. Take any belt you purchase. By the time you come home from *Chandni Chowk*¹ and try it on, the stomach is bigger, and the ends of the belt do not meet!

We have to learn to keep our stomach in parity, so that the belt may be sufficient to cover it or else the whole life or the twenty four hours in a day will not be sufficient to fatten the body or the stomach. So if your stomach grows bigger, then something must be done and today the modern man, whether he is a capitalist or an ordinary man, seems to think that the stomach has grown so big now that the entire head is inside it. The stomach has become so big that there is nothing beyond the stomach - the head is also a stomach, the heart is also a stomach! Nothing goes beyond the stomach because the stomach has become so big that the appetite to live the sensuous life has become insatiable. How will he be able to work? A man who is a great sprinter, one who is good at running and wants to become an Olympian, needs agility of body, he must keep his physical body in good shape. With a growing stomach, he cannot be a sportsman in life. He cannot even move about properly.

We think that intellectually we have become so pot-bellied, and have got so much to satisfy that even the two hands, two legs and twenty four hours around the clock seem to be not sufficient. There is, therefore, disgruntlement at all times and discontentment in the heart. A man who is riddled with discontentment cannot act beautifully in the world outside. He cannot have a greater vision of life, continuously working in the world outside.

When I was a student in Lucknow, I went once to meet Mr. Sapru. He was the greatest man at that time in the field of law. He asked me, "Young man, what do you want?" I said, "Sir, I am a student of law in this university." "Hmm", he said, with a grandfather-like dignity, "Accha (ok), sit down." I sat down. "What do you want?" he asked, as he was looking through his glasses (you know the frightening look of the aged people). I said, "All that I want from you Sir is the secret of success in your profession. I am going to enter your profession and I would like to know this." He looked at me rather piercingly and said, "Look, my son, I think you will never be a successful lawyer."

"This is very unfair, Sir because I am just now coming into the second year. How dare you say that?"

• Name of place in Delhi

"No, my boy, you cannot. Your clothes and your entire attitude, I think, are not good.

"I will try to change, but will you please tell me the secret?"

I said, "How did you come to the height? What is the secret of it?"

He told me, "The secret of becoming successful in the world, and if you want to take my place in the world, there is only one method – **Live like a hermit, work like a bull, work like a horse.**" He corrected himself because the bull is not swift. He continued, "For the last twenty two years, would you believe it my dear boy, I have never seen a picture, not because I cannot afford it, but I have no time to see a picture." Sir C. V. Raman also said that he had not seen a picture. Which is the club that Mr. Nehru is visiting nowadays? Where is the time for these things for such men of success, men of action?

Take any man of success in any profession, he has no time to waste in the coffeehouse, no time even to go near the picture houses, but most of the people, if they have a little time at their disposal, go round and round *Connaught Place*^{*}, polishing the verandahs. They have nothing to crave for, to demand, to work, to achieve for themselves. All that they want is to live at the flesh-level. Such men are to be counted with animals only because the animal also lives at the flesh-level, either it eats, or licks or mates. If a man also remains at that level only, he will live only an animal life, and in the animal kingdom, happiness and prosperity and peace can never be because they are not the destiny of animals.

Prosperity, culture and progress are possible not merely because you are physically a human being, but only if you are human in your mind and intellect. If you do not attain this great human stature within your intellect, then national progress is impeded, the general progress of the country is impeded and you and I shall weep on and on, quarrelling with everybody, with every government that might come in the country, and die away in sorrow and tears alone, never gaining that joy of having lived.

In order to live and to bring out the maximum happiness from ourselves, to work out the best for ourselves, everyone of us must have a goal in life, a mission, an inspiring ideal; looking up to that ideal and hitching our eyes to it, we must work on in the world outside. Thereby, the work becomes chaste, the work itself becomes its own reward for the individual and a great joy wells up in his mind, not in terms of what he gets on the first of the month, but what he gives to society as best as he can, from the place where he is.

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