

The Seven Deadly Social Sins

explained by Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mohandas Gandhi

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Politics without Principles

Gandhi said those who firmly believe in nonviolence should never stand for elections, but they should elect representatives who are willing to understand and practice the philosophy. Gandhi said an elected representative is one on whom you have bestowed your power of attorney. Such a person should be allowed to wield authority only as long as s/he enjoys your confidence. When politicians indulge in power games, they act without principles. To remain in power at all cost is unethical. Gandhi said when politicians (or anyone else, for that matter) give up the pursuit of Truth they, or in the case of parties, would be doomed. Partisan politics, lobbying, bribing, and other forms of malpractice that are so rampant in politics today is also unprincipled. Politics has earned the reputation of being dirty. It is so because we made it dirty. We create power groups to lobby for our cause and are willing to do anything to achieve our goal. Not many among human kind have learned how to resist temptation, so who is to blame for the mess we find ourselves in?

Wealth Without Work

This includes playing the stock market; gambling; sweat-shop slavery; over-estimating one's worth, like some heads of corporations drawing exorbitant salaries which are not always commensurate with the work they do. Gandhiji's idea originates from the ancient Indian practice of Tenant Farmers (Zamindari). The poor were made to slog on the farms while the rich raked in the profits. With capitalism and materialism spreading so rampantly around the world the grey area between an honest day's hard work and sitting back and profiting from other people's labor is growing wider. To conserve the resources of the world and share these resources equitably with all so that everyone can aspire to a good standard of living, Gandhi believed people should take only as much as they honestly need. The United States provides a typical example. The country spends an estimated \$200 billion a year on manufacturing cigarettes, alcohol and allied products which harm people's health. What the country spends in terms of providing medical and research facilities to provide and find cures for health hazards caused by over-indulgence in tobacco and alcohol is mind-blowing. There is enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed, Gandhi said.

Pleasure Without Conscience

This is connected to wealth without work. People find imaginative and dangerous ways of bringing excitement to their otherwise dull lives. Their search for pleasure and excitement often ends up costing society very heavily. Taking drugs and playing dangerous games cause avoidable health problems that cost the world hundreds of billions of dollars in direct and indirect health care facilities. Many of these problems are self-induced or ailments caused by careless attitudes. The United States spends more than \$250 billion on leisure activities while 25 million children die each year because of hunger, malnutrition, and lack of medical facilities. Irresponsible and unconscionable acts of sexual pleasure and indulgence also cost the people and the country very heavily. Not only do young people lose their childhood but innocent babies are brought into the world and often left to the care of the society. The emotional, financial, and moral price is heavy on everyone. Gandhi believed pleasure must come from within the soul and excitement from serving the needy, from caring for the family, the children, and relatives. Building sound human relationships can be an exciting and adventurous activity.

Unfortunately, we ignore the spiritual pleasures of life and indulge in the physical pleasures which is "pleasure without conscience."

Knowledge Without Character

Our obsession with materialism tends to make us more concerned about acquiring knowledge so that we can get a better job and make more money. A lucrative career is preferred to an illustrious character. Our educational centers emphasize career-building and not character-building. Gandhi believed if one is not able to understand one's self, how can one understand the philosophy of life. He used to tell me the story of a young man who was an outstanding student throughout his scholastic career. He scored "A's" in every subject and strove harder and harder to maintain his grades. He became a bookworm. However, when he passed with distinction and got a lucrative job, he could not deal with people nor could he build relationships. He had no time to learn these important aspects of life. Consequently, he could not live with his wife and children nor work with his colleagues. His life ended up being a misery. All those years of study and excellent grades did not bring him happiness. Therefore, it is not true that a person who is successful in amassing wealth is necessarily happy. An education that ignores character- building is an incomplete education.

Commerce Without Morality

As in wealth without work we indulge in commerce without morality to make more money by any means possible. Price gouging, palming off inferior products, cheating and making false claims are a few of the obvious ways in which we indulge in commerce without morality. There are also thousands of other ways in which we do immoral or unethical business. When profit-making becomes the most important aspect of business, morals and ethics usually go overboard. We cut benefits and even salaries of employees. If possible we employ "slave" labor, like the sweat shops and migrant farm workers in New York and California where workers are thoroughly exploited. Profit supersedes the needs of people. When business is unable to deal with labor it begins to mechanize. Mechanization, it is claimed, increases efficiency, but in reality it is instituted simply to make more money. Alternate jobs may be created for a few. Others will fall by the wayside and languish. Who cares? People don't matter, profits do. In more sophisticated language what we are really saying is that those who cannot keep up with the technological changes and exigencies of the times do not deserve to live--a concept on which Hitler built the Nazi Party. If society does not care for such people, can we blame them if they become criminals?

Science Without Humanity

This is science used to discover increasingly more gruesome weapons of destruction that threaten to eventually wipe out humanity. The NRA says guns don't kill people, people kill people. What they do not say is that if people didn't have guns they wouldn't have the capacity to kill as quickly or as easily. If hunting can be considered a sport, it is the most insensitive and dehumanizing sport on earth. How can killing animals bring fun and excitement to anyone? This is pleasure without conscience. When we cease to care for any life, we cease to respect all life. No other species on earth has wrought more destruction than man. Materialism has made us possessive. The more we possess the more we need to protect and so the more ruthless we become. As punishment, we will kill if some one steals to buy bread. We feel violated. But we will not bother our heads to find out why, in times of plenty, people have to live in hunger. In order to protect and secure our homes, our neighborhoods, our countries from attacks, we use science to discover frightening weapons of destruction. The debate over the use of the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is a question that falls under this category. War is sometimes inevitable only because we are such ardent nationalists that we quickly label ourselves by our country of origin, by gender, by the color of our skin, by the language we

speak, by the religion we practice, by the town or the state we come from and so on. The labels dehumanize us, and we become mere objects. Not too long ago even wars were fought according to rules, regulations, ethics and some semblance of morality. Then Hitler changed the rules because of his monumental hate and the rest of us followed suit. Now we can obliterate cities and inhabitants by pressing a button and not be affected by the destruction because we don't see it.

Worship Without Sacrifice

One person's faith is another person's fantasy because religion has been reduced to meaningless rituals practiced mindlessly. Temples, churches, synagogues, mosques and those entrusted with the duty of interpreting religion to lay people seek to control through fear of hell, damnation, and purgatory. In the name of God they have spawned more hate and violence than any government. True religion is based on spirituality, love, compassion, understanding, and appreciation of each other whatever our beliefs may be — Christians, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Atheists, Agnostics or whatever. Gandhi believed whatever labels we put on our faith, ultimately all of us worship Truth because Truth is God. Superficially we may be very devout believers and make a tremendous public show of our worship, but if that belief, understanding, compassion, love and appreciation is not translated into our lives, prayers will have no meaning. True worship demands sacrifice not just in terms of the number of times a day we say our prayers but in how sincere we are in translating those prayers into life styles. In the 1930's many Christian and Moslem clergy flocked into India to convert the millions who were oppressed as untouchables. The Christian clergy stood on street corners loudly denouncing Hinduism and proclaiming the virtues of Christianity. Months went by without a single convert accepting the offer. Frustrated, one priest asked Grandfather: After all the oppression and discrimination that the 'untouchables' suffer under Hinduism, why is it they do not accept our offer of a better life under Christianity? Grandfather replied: When you stop telling them how good Christianity is and start living it, you will find more converts than you can cope with. These words of wisdom apply to all religions of the world. We want to shout from roof-tops the virtues of our beliefs and not translate them into our lives.