

From *Climbing the Blue Mountain* by Eknath Easwaran, pages 50-54.

[How people get to be the way they are and why DIPM volunteers do what they do.]

Living in harmony with all—our family, our society, all forms of life—is the truth of life, and this truth alone can support us. There are many people who will say that it is human nature to hate, to fight, and to kill, but the mystics say it is the law of the beasts. Having become human, we have risen above this law. Any human being who hates, who uses violence, who kills, according to the mystics, has gone back to the level of an animal.

In the Dhammapada, the Buddha uses a terrible phrase for people who have reversed their evolution in this way. Those who have forgotten the unity of life and who believe they are separate, who are self-willed and live for their own satisfaction, will not stop at any evil deed.

People who are fond of money, for example, begin in a very ordinary way. They don't want to exploit, they don't want to bring about the ruin of other people, they don't want to despoil the land. They simply want to make a certain amount of money, and so they start their business, whatever it may be, in a very quiet way, not too much at the expense of others. But as they get more money, their love for money grows. Now, instead of being content at doing a little harm to others, they say, "Why not exploit people? Why not go into the mass production of cigarettes, liquor, drugs, or armaments? That will bring us a lot of money." Little by little by little this inordinate love of profit destroys all humanity.

Take, for example, the armament industry. I have been reading recently the story of Sir Basil Zaharoff, the father of this enterprise. He would go to one country and sell them a particular gun, then go to another and tell them, "I can sell you a gun that can out-shoot that gun." The terrible part of that story is that it is still going on today. With food getting scarcer and famine stalking across the world, billions of dollars are being spent on armaments. Unfortunately, the highly advanced technological countries are also selling to poor countries, for whom these weapons are not only necessary but also replace those resources needed for providing food.

Such is our confusion that we think, in the language of Sri Ramakrishna, that we have to go east to go west. The production and sale of armaments leads to warfare and not peace. When underdeveloped countries ask for planes and armaments, let us send them wheat and soybeans. This is truly promoting peace. The point here is that those engaged in selling armaments did not start out with hatred; they just wanted to make money. The love of money can gradually make people forget their sense of decency, their sense of kindness, their sense of unity....

Human cupidity [avarice, lust] is so easy to arouse. This is what the profit-making enterprises bank on. They inflame our cupidity in all kinds of devious ways, and once this happens, we will buy anything. All they have to do is say, "More."

.....There are a lot of us who say, “This doesn’t apply to me,” but who can say that about greed for pleasure? Every one of us has to remember therefore, that as long as we are driven compulsively by a desire for personal profit or personal pleasure, our will can be vitiated. We can start out, as everyone starts out, rather nice, maybe sometimes even noble, and on a few rare occasions even selfless. Gradually all these finer qualities wither away, and the desire for pleasure and profit changes the look in our eyes and even our very life. After a number of years, we do not care about other people’s needs because we are completely enveloped in what we like, what we enjoy, what appeals to us. It is good to remember that this can happen to anyone.

It is a sad slander on human nature that our very best work can be done only under the compulsion of money or pleasure, but this is what most people believe today. There is a certain amount of work that can be gotten out of people by offering them good wages and overtime, but if you want the best out of people, you have to offer them a deeper appeal—to their sense of unity. Tell a person that there is no money or pleasure in this, but that he will be contributing to making his city and his world a better place to live, and gradually he will respond. When this appeal gets into a person’s consciousness, she gives her very best, joyfully and continuously.

When Mahatma Gandhi wanted people to help in his work, he would give his angelic, toothless smile and say, “I can offer you magnificent rewards: two years in prison, confiscation of all your property, work without respite every day of the week, and the increasing joy of knowing that your life really counts.” This is the joy of human nature; the most daring and resourceful people would respond.

It is a basic spiritual law that the person who lives for himself or herself, in violation of the unity of life, lives in sorrow, while the person who gives freely to all lives in abiding joy.