

No Compromise

As we grow up, our social surrounding expands, and our interactions with it increase. We influence it and get influenced by it. But we can be selective in accepting the incoming flow of ideas. The power of discrimination and freedom of choice are already present in us, and these can also be cultivated further with proper training. Such training or its absence makes us what we are. Till now it gets little importance in education. Therefore, untrained men may take in harmful influences from the environment and become dwarfed. They comprise the vast majority. Some, on the other hand, by training or self-education, acquire better discrimination for right resolve. Only a few can do it indeed. For it means standing aside from the common run of society. It means swimming against the current. It may mean inviting isolation, ridicule, and opposition.

So, the strong must come forward for reversing the current. Tears of the suffering masses must be wiped, their agonized faces must be lit with hope and smile. This gigantic task awaits us. It cannot be accomplished if we join the easy-going majority and be careless about truth, sincerity, sympathy for others, etc. Unfortunately most of us capitulate. We are afraid to differ, even when we are sure that we are correct and most people around us are not. We smile where society requires us to smile. We fear of falling in disfavour of others, of being mocked at, of losing friends, and so on. Due to fear we forget our cherished thoughts, forget our hapless brothers. Young people learn to compromise and follow the dictates of society. They are not taught to face peer pressure with self-confidence, with a backbone. Eventually they climb down from the heights of noble emotions. Fiery youth vanishes into what we call *practicality*!

Only a high and lovable ideal and a proper value system can make us strong. Our will should take us to what we value most. When Narendra was a student, one day in a discussion with a friend he split mankind into two broad groups. 'They idealize what is apparently real', said he about the vast majority of mankind, who value the small and transient things of life (the apparently real) as the most precious. And of the few noble souls struggling to reach a high ideal at any cost he said, 'They want to realize the ideal.' The second group does not bring the ideal down for cheap comfort, but strives to rise up towards the ideal. So, the value systems of the two groups are poles apart. Considering the frailties of man and the absence of proper training, the second group must be small. But in this group lies the power to revolutionize society. In spite of initial non-recognition and isolation, their ideas are accepted by society gradually, in due course of time. Human history amply demonstrates this.

After Sri Ramakrishna left his mortal coil, his young disciples renounced the world and struggled hard to realize the ideal he lived. They tasted chill penury and isolation. Narendra was their leader. He reminisced in a lecture years later:

'And there we were. "No compromise!" was the watchword. "This is the ideal, and this has got to be carried out. If we meet the king, though we die, we must give him a bit of our minds; if the peasant, the same." Naturally, we met with antagonism.

'But, mind you, this is life's experience; if you really want the good of others, the whole universe may stand against you and cannot hurt you. It must crumble before your power of the Lord Himself in you if you are sincere and really unselfish. And those boys were that.'

So they created history. Either we follow society or society follows us. Either we become creatures of history or we create history. None can cast their life in the mould of a high ideal and yet follow society. The life of Netaji Subhas also exemplified this fact.

In a letter to Mary Hale, his American sister, Swami Vivekananda wrote, 'I do everything to be sweet, but when it comes to a horrible compromise with the truth within, then I stop. I do not believe in humility. I believe in *Samadarshitva* – same state of mind with regard to all. The duty of the ordinary man is to obey the commands of his "God", society; but the children of light never do so. This is an eternal law. One accommodates himself to surroundings and social opinion and gets all good things from society, the giver of all good to such. The other stands alone and draws society up towards him. The accommodating man finds a path of roses; the non-accommodating, one of thorns. But the worshippers of "Vox populi" go to annihilation in a moment; the children of truth live for ever.'

His advice for his young followers has ever been that: 'Let people say whatever they like, stick to your own convictions, and rest assured, the world will be at your feet.' And he said, 'This attempt at compromise proceeds from arrant downright cowardice. Be bold! My children should be brave, above all. Not the least compromise on any account. Preach the highest truths broadcast. Do not fear losing your respect or causing unhappy friction. Rest assured that if you serve truth in spite of temptations to forsake it, you will attain a heavenly strength in the face of which men will quail to speak before you things which you do not believe to be true.'

This is the spirit that makes men and leaders of men, who can really change things for the better.