

Our Duties

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What do we want? We want to be happy. What is happiness? Normally we do not know. We run helter skelter and after everything in search of happiness. And in this mad rush we forget that something is wanted of us also. What is wanted of us? It is wanted that we should be dutiful. Duty towards whom? Duty to ourselves, duty to family, duty to society, duty to country, duty to humanity.

We understand what you mean by duty to family. You mean, we should earn as much as possible in the sweat of our brow with the minimum of leisure and spend the minimum for ourselves and provide for everything for the family. But what could be our duty to ourselves? Duty to society belongs to social workers and that to country to the politicians and the representatives of the people who are elected for the purpose. What could be our duty to society or the country?

This is how the general mass of people thinks. This is wrong. No duty can be performed properly unless duty is understood in its totality. Duty to family can be done better by one who understands his duty to himself, his duty to society and the country. Because the family is a unit of the society and the individual is a member of the family. And the individual, the family, the society, and the country – all go to form one humanity. Seen in this way duty to oneself or to the family is a part of the duty to humanity. We have to understand all our duties to this light. For we are not only spectators of the drama of the world, which is the becoming of men, according to Swami Vivekananda; but also actors on the stage (as observed by a renowned scientist of our age, Niels Bohr) contributing our mite for the good of humanity.

In this perspective our duty towards ourselves becomes much more important and we can also understand that we have some duty to society and the country. Our duty to ourselves is simply to strive to bring out the best in ourselves. The best of our abilities and the best of our qualities. We do not actually acquire abilities and qualities from outside. Abilities and qualities are already in us, dormant. We have to awaken them, bring them out, express them, and make use of them through self-effort. This is the most holy duty that we owe ourselves. This sense of duty comes from the consciousness about our own dignity as men. If we neglect this duty, we not only do harm to ourselves, but also retard the welfare of mankind. He who performs this duty towards himself in bringing out the best in him, becomes more efficient in the discharge of his duties to his family, towards society and the country. How to go about doing this duty to oneself, to bring out the best in oneself?

Duties to society and the country may be performed in various ways. This may be done either by taking up such work as the sole occupation of one's life or by investing one's surplus energy, time, and money for the purpose. There are various fields in which one may work for this. The fields may be philanthropic work, social service, education, social reforms, politics, religion, and so on. There is a long history of such works in these

fields in all countries. In the past such works used to be done mostly by individuals. Later on these were undertaken in an organized manner through various private agencies. The state through political patronage gradually started to enter these fields in ever widening areas, leaving certain works for the private agencies and a meager remainder for individuals. This is only natural in the changed economic and social conditions generally in all societies. It may be asked, if this changed circumstance absolves individuals of their duty to society and to the country.

The answer is, no. On the contrary, the changed circumstance having freed individuals from some old burdens of social obligations has devolved upon them a more onerous duty of serving others in such a way that they may be conscious of their duties towards themselves, which ultimately make them aware of their duties to society and country. This may also be done individually or in an organized way.

The duty to oneself, that is to strive to bring out the best of one's abilities and qualities already possessed, may be called 'being' or 'becoming'. That is how we can understand 'BE' of Swami Vivekananda's motto 'BE AND MAKE'. The duty towards society and country performed through helping others in making them conscious of their own human dignity, potentiality, and duty, and showing them how to bring out the best in them to 'become' what they really are, may be understood as 'MAKING' in the above motto.

Swami Vivekananda has spoken so much on so many subjects, such as religion, sociology, politics, economics, education, science and technology, history, aesthetics, etc. etc. But again and again he reverted to one simple proposition, namely 'first be men', 'first make men', 'Be and make – let this be your motto.' If that could be done everything else will take care of itself, he assured again and again.

This is the work the Mahamandal has chosen. There are so many agencies to take care of other duties and obligations to society. All such works are money intensive. The Mahamandal has only energy, feeling, and will to work: for investment. It has chosen to use these to translate this central teaching of Swami Vivekananda into practice both individually and in an organized way throughout the length and breadth of India.