

Life is Role Playing¹ Swami Dayananda Saraswati

Action and reaction, as we know from physics, are both equal and opposite. You cannot rub against something, without yourself getting rubbed in the process. However, I am looking at these two words with reference to one's response to the world.

LIFE INVOLVES RELATIONSHIP

You cannot avoid relating as well as responding to the world, whether you like it. You must necessarily relate to the world in order to live your life; you need not relate to the world just to be alive. When you are in deep sleep, you are alive but you do not relate to the world; there is no world, in fact, for you. There is no relationship, no memories, no situational problems to cause any concern. You are just alive; you merely exist. You can exist even in a state of coma, without in any way relating to the world. It is possible to keep a person alive in coma for years on life support systems. However, that is not living. In order to live your life, you need to relate to the world.

Any relationship implies two factors: one is you, the person, who relates and the other is what or whom you relate to. Of these two, one is a changing factor – that which you are related to. The situation to which you are related keeps on changing all the time and the change can be total. Now you see fire and now you see a stream of water; two things entirely different in nature. You meet your father and the next moment you meet your son. The object has completely changed, the son replacing the father. In terms of sensory perception, the objects constantly change. You perceive a form or smell or sound or touch or taste. Thus, the world you confront keeps changing whereas you, the one who confronts the world, is invariable. A person who sees a form is the same who hears a sound. The one who saw and heard is the one who is talking to someone now. The person, 'you' remains the same, whereas the objects keep changing. Therefore,

¹ Excerpt from *Action and Reaction*, Arsha Vidya Research and Publications, Chennai, 2007.

we can say that of the two factors involved in relating, one is variable and the other, the one who confronts, is invariable. You are the same person whether you relate to father or son, uncle or husband, friends or foe, employer or employee. You are the same whether you see or hear, walk or talk, sing or smell. This is true even from the standpoint of mental activities: the one who doubts is the one who decides; the one who loves is the one who hates; the one who is kind is the one who is cruel. The person is invariable and that is you.

THE INVARIABLE FACTOR

We need to look into the 'you' that is invariable. Is it totally invariable? We cannot say so because there seems to be a variable status even for the subject, the person who relates, in keeping with what or whom he or she relates. When you relate to your father either mentally or perceptually; you are a son. Again, when you relate to your son, you are no longer the previous person, the son; you are now a father. You undergo a change. The subject 'I' that was a son while relating to the father has changed to become a father while relating to the son. The person 'I' is there but he or she has a different status now. To a sister, the 'I' is a brother; to a wife, the 'I' is a husband; to a student 'I' is a teacher and to a teacher the 'I' is a student. Thus, because of a relationship, the 'I' also undergoes change.

The change in the 'I', however, is not total as is the case with the objects with which the 'I' relates. The object can be a form perceived earlier, that is totally replaced by a sound heard now. The object can be a friend that is totally replaced by another, a stranger, the exact opposite. There is something I like and something I do not like. Thus the change in the object is total. The subject 'I', however, is not totally replaced. If it is, there will be no continuity at all. The father-I is replaced by the son-I, but the 'I' is not totally replaced. If it is totally replaced, there will be neither father nor son because the one who related to the son has vanished, while a new one who has appeared in his place cannot have a relationship with the father. If an invariable factor is not there in the subject, there will be no thread to connect the experiences. Hence, the subject does undergo a change in relation to the object but the change is not total; it is incidental and partial.

The partial change in the subject 'I' does not seem to leave any trace upon the 'I'. Imagine that while you are talking to your sister, your wife comes along and you start talking to her. In relation to your wife, the brother goes away completely

and the husband has taken his place. You are very much there, remember, because the one who was a brother is the same who is now the husband. At the same time, the previous role does not leave a trace upon you, the subject. Therefore, you are able to assume a new role altogether without suffering a change on your part. It reveals a great fact about life. It is an amazing capacity to undergo change when you relate to something, without intrinsically undergoing change. It is this capacity that makes your life imbued with freshness and freedom. If you do not recognise this fact fully, it is indeed a great tragedy and life becomes a misery.

The invariable factor 'I' undergoes a seeming change with reference to a particular situation. When I come in contact with an object that I like I become a liker. The next moment, if I come in contact with an object that I dislike I immediately become a disliker. In both these situations the 'I' is very much present. This 'I' is invariable and is therefore neither a liker nor a disliker. Is it not true? If you know this to be true, you have made your life.

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