

Reflecting on Values

by Melkote Ramaswamy

Most recently, one of the Presidential candidates has proposed an Ideological Test—based on American values—for being admitted as an Immigrant to the United States. This highlights the need to discuss and understand the meaning of values.

When we talk of value, we generally think of what is of use, impact, import—in short what is valuable or of value.

When we talk of adding value, we mean making something more valuable than it is. We say “Don’t say a word if you have nothing of value to add to the conversation.”

We often say: “I value your friendship, your presence, support etc. Whatever you do adds value.” Then there is value-added tax (VAT). We are aware of customs official asking “Do you have anything of value to declare,” How often do we hear of “You are a valued customer. We value your contributions.”

Real Estate experts advise us that remodeling a kitchen or bathroom adds value to the house—meaning re-sale value. On the other hand, painting a house in different colors may not add as much value, but only nominal value in the sense of making it more attractive to the buyer—sort of curb appeal.

Universal Values are acknowledged as consisting of honesty, fairness, being truthful, not hurting others (treating others the way you wish to be treated by them)-

Then there are values derived from Constitution—value for freedom in all its forms. We need to distinguish values from rights—right to vote, bear arms, etc. We should remember, however, that rights go hand in hand with duties—what is one man’s right is often the duty of another. For example, right to individual’s health care may be the duty of the Government.

Religion has its own imprint: We associate Catholicism with value of broadmindedness we often hear of upholding Christian values. Then there is the Hindu value for Ahimsa—principle of non-injury which proclaims all life is sacred and is at the root of vegetarianism. It is an extension of Black Lives Matter to All Lives Matter to Life matters in every form.

When we talk of American values, we think of dignity of labor, equality, freedom of speech, of pursuit of happiness, of gay rights, to name just a few.

Military may boast of its own values: such as honor, dignity, discipline, patriotism—these values while at first sight may appear to be disconnected with universal values can, on closer examination, be traced to basic value of love for the country.

Then there are regional flavors. Folks in Indiana talk of Hoosier values such as being hospitable. Actually, hospitality is a form of kindness and compassion and is an extension of value for love—kindness and compassion which are universal values. On a closer look, we find Hoosier values are a natural subset of universal values.

The world is engaged in sustaining universal values—it is their breakdown that is the cause of all problems and conflicts: corruption, crime, violence, wars, etc.

Values should be a positive cementing force to bring people together in the quest for a life of peace and harmony. Peace should be the universal norm if all nations respect the universal values.

Religion and spirituality add value to human life, dignify and elevate life. Otherwise, there is not much difference between humans and animals—what distinguishes humans is the ability to exercise free will, the desire to understand who we are and grow emotionally and spiritually.

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Samadhi of Swami Nissreyasananda

Swamiji was the pitathipati of Sri Sreenivasa Ashram, Agaram, Karnataka. He was the student of Pujya Swamiji in the first course at Anaikkati.

Swamiji attained maha samadhi on 23rd September 2016

