

## **The Spark within a Rotarian**

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I am indeed delighted and deem it a matter of privilege for me to be present before this august audience in Rotary Institute where Rotary's think-tank and leaders from India and around are present. You are all dedicated Rotarians, devoted to the cause of the Rotary, having accepted the ideal of Rotary service as an aim of your life. You are men of action; you believe in what you do and you do what you believe in. The unique methodology of selecting the service minded people, who are best suited to represent that section of the society to which they belong as leaders thereof, are loaned a particular classification. The typical phraseology employed by Rotary International- 'loaning out a classification to a person selected to represent a particular profession, vocation or business in Rotary' implies the member incurring a debt which has to be repaid. At the same time every member of a Rotary club ideally represents a group of people. It is this quality to lead and represent a particular section of society that inculcates in him the influence to carry the message of Rotary to the grass root levels of the society. With the figure of Rotary membership in India having stimulated itself at about one lac which is nearly 10% of the total world population of Rotary, it follows that Rotary has strength, enthusiasm and relevance in this part of the world. We are ridden with population explosion, poverty, illiteracy, ill-health, and the worst- the communal disharmony. Challenges are many and so are the fronts to be fought against. We are positive thinkers. For us, there are not problems; we look at them opportunities for service. I am confident that each one of you has a tremendous invincible potential in him to set in motion a chain reaction of service, brotherhood, understanding, love and compassion. I am here only to remind you and make you realize what you are and what you are capable of doing and how?

I ask a question to myself? Why Rotarian R.K. Saboo and Rotarian Ashok Mahajan have made me stand before you today? I am a man of justice! You are all leading symbols of service and generosity. It seems that there is something common between the two of us, and something uncommon too which places you all on a pedestal higher than mine. 'Justice' is giving every man his due-what is owed to him. That is what I have been doing. 'Generosity' is giving to other person what is not his but yours. That is what you do. But, both of us 'give'. And, as Chamfort writes-"one must be just before one can be generous." That is the link between me and you.

Yet another justification. I became a Rotarian when I was just a teenager in law as profession. For 21 years I remained a volunteer in active Rotary service. To me Rotary was not a philosophy, much less a religion; to me Rotary was just a righteous way of life which I learnt, accepted and practiced. Rotary, specially its 4-way test made me learn the essential virtues of life. Practicing the ideals of Rotary in my personal life and in my profession enabled me to learn those secrets of success in profession that I went on climbing and never looked back. In my journey, beginning from a small district court lawyer to the highest seat of judiciary in the country. I candidly say, Rotary too has played its role. I am indebted to Rotary. In the fulfilment of my life with progress, prosperity and achievements-all by God's Grace, I have experienced the truth of the oft-quoted words of Oliver Wendell Homes- "Man's mind once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions".

There are a few basic questions which are asked often. What is Rotary? Why I became a Rotarian? What I seek to achieve? And, how ? Past RI president Bill Boyd beautifully answered these questions. He has once said :

Rotary is about so many things: friendship and fellowship, international understanding and co-operation, vocational ethics and community leadership. All these values brought us to Rotary, and, all are reasons why we stay as Rotarians. Rotary seeks to serve and put service above self. Rotarians are the people who have come together to serve others as together they can do it better, more effectively and more enjoyably than they could have alone.

The four avenues of service, central to Rotary's methodology of working lead the way to the destination and make your dreams real. Rotary believes that the whole world is our community and by promoting the well being of people of all ages in every region of the planet earth we can establish world peace. Every act of service which relieves suffering in this world brings peace a step nearer. All of us came to Rotary because somebody wanted to share Rotary with us and as a necessary corollary it is our duty to share and serve. The four objects of service spell out our destination and also the path which we have to tread. The key line is –‘ the object of Rotary is to encourage and foster the ideal of service as a basis of worthy enterprise’. The four objectives enumerated thereafter illustrate and expand this basic truth. However, in Rotary these four objects I have read not merely as objects but as oath or solemn affirmation. I would read the 4 objects, in the form of an oath or affirmation, as under, and hope that every Rotarian does it.

“I swear in the name of God or I state on solemn affirmation;

- that I shall develop acquaintance as an opportunity for service;
- that I shall maintain high ethical standards in business and profession; recognize the worthiness of all useful occupations; and shall dignify my occupation as an opportunity to serve society;

- that I shall apply the ideal of service in my personal, business and community life;
- that I shall advance international understanding, goodwill, and peace through a world fellowship of business and professional persons united in the ideal of service (which obviously is Rotary)”

In these objects (which I have read as an oath) there are two key expressions to be found. They are: (i) ‘the ideal of service’ and (ii) ‘application of ethics’ in personal, vocational and community life. ‘Service’ and ‘ethics’! The mission of Rotary International, as stated in its MOP, also speaks of providing ‘service’ and promoting ‘high ethical standards’. The theme of my address – ‘the Spark within Rotarian’ is, to put it in other words, ‘service and ethics’. Service is the *spark* to be ignited by *ethics*. As President D K Lee says to make dreams real we need pure heart- *chim shin uro* (in Korean)

### **Service**

Compassion, charity, love and brotherhood or fellowship- all taken together will not be able to convey the meaning of ‘service’ which Rotary comprehends as its ideal or motto. The concept of selfless service originates from all Love for the fellow human beings and almost all living creatures. If I believe that I am a child of God then it will not be difficult for me to believe that every other human being too is a child of God. However, some are more blessed than the others. Therefore, he is most blessed who can give than to receive. Our creator- the God- in his wisdom expects us to live and work not merely for our own pleasure and our own benefit but also for the service and benefit of others. Service to society does not require a hefty wallet, strong limbs and heroic deeds or great sacrifices. A helping hand, a friendly word or gesture, a kind smile will more than suffice. In the words of Mark Twain: ‘kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the

blind can read!'. Service with compassion binds the humanity together in the bond of unity and peace.

Epictetus, an emancipated slave, was a Greek Stoic philosopher. He reminded all human beings what we often forget that each of us contains a divine spark, a "part of God". Sai Baba, whose followers believe him to be God incarnate, was once asked by a journalist, "Are you God"? He gently responded, "Yes I am, and so are you. The only difference between you and me is that I know it and you don't." He continued to say, when you know that you are a divine manifestation of God, divinity starts expressing itself through you by making you love and serve all creatures of God.

God cannot be satisfied with our adoration and devotion if they come only from lips. Our hearts and our own lives must bear witness to our devotion- and what better way to achieve this than through the service of our fellow human beings. All of us need not necessarily be rich in money; but all of us could be rich in love and generosity. We could always give loving interest and concern to others- which is worth more than all the money in the world.

The philosophy of Rotary was expressed with remarkable brevity by our national leader Mahatma Gandhi. He had said, "To my mind as soon as man looks upon himself as a servant of society, earns for its sake and spends for its sake then his earnings are virtuous and his business venture is constructive."

### **He profits most who serves best.**

One day, a poor boy who was selling goods from door to door to pay his way through school, found he has only one thin dime left, and he was hungry.

He decided he would ask for a meal at the next house. However, he lost his nerve when a lovely young woman opened the door.

Instead of meal he asked for a drink of water. She thought he looked hungry so brought him a large glass of milk. He drank it slowly, and then asked, How much do I owe you?"

"You don't owe me anything," she replied. "Mother has taught us never to accept pay for a kindness."

He said. "Then I thank you from my heart."

As Howard Kelly left that house, he not only felt stronger physically, but his faith in God and man was much stronger than before. He was surcharged with a determination.

Many years later that same young woman became critically ill. The local doctors were baffled. They finally sent her to the big city, where they called in specialists to study her rare disease.

Dr. Howard Kelly was called in for the consultation. When he heard the name of the town she came from, a strange light filled his eyes.

Immediately he rose and went down the hall of the hospital to her room.

Dressed in his doctor's gown he went in to see her. He recognised her at once.

He went back to the consultation room determined to do his best to save her life. From that day he gave special attention to her case. After a long struggle, the battle was won.

Dr. Kelly requested the business office to pass the final bill to him for approval. He looked at it, then wrote something on the edge and the bill was

sent to her room. She feared to open it, for she was sure it would take the rest of her life to pay for it all. Finally she looked, and something caught her attention on the side of the bill. She read these words.

“Paid in full with one glass of milk.”

(Signed) Dr. Howard Kelly.

Tears of joy flooded her eyes as her happy heart prayed: “Thank you, God, that Your love has spread broad through human hearts and hands.”

Swami Vivekananda the great Indian role model, who believed in translating ideas into action, has said-“we are responsible for what we are, and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. If what we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in future can be produced by our present actions; so we have to know how to act.”

Do selfless service with a sense of gratitude to the one who is served. Jesus found a visually challenged person fallen into a dry well. Jesus reached him and helped him to recover from the well. Having done so, Jesus profusely thanked the visually challenged person. People around were surprised. Jesus said, I am thankful to him because he suffered only for giving me an opportunity of service.

Service with compassion is our duty not only to others but also for self. The *karma* we perform and accrue in this life is extremely relevant to our next life. We always reap that which we sow. Therefore, performing good deeds with selfless motive will definitely lead to positive *karma* both in this life and in future lives. We must do good deeds because it is right thing to do. We must perform right action because that is what will lead us to God and make our dreams come true. Service to humanity is service to God. And, only He can put the light in our eyes, the glow on our face and the song in

our heart. Those who have done selfless service, will agree that we ourselves are benefited immeasurably as our hearts fill with joy, with peace and with love. The life becomes full of meaning.

A small, impoverished boy was standing barefoot on the New York City streets, looking wistfully in the window of a shoe store. A well-dressed woman saw him and asked him, “why are you looking so solemnly in this window?” the small boy looked up at her and replied, “I am asking God to please give me a pair of shoes”.

The woman took the boy’s small hand and led him into the shoe store, where she immediately asked the clerk for bucket of warm water and 10 pairs of socks. Then, placing the boy’s dirty feet into the water, she tenderly washed them and then put a pair of warm socks on him. Then, she told the clerk to bring shoes for the boy.

As they left the store, the boy’s small feet now warm and comfortably placed in a pair of new shoes, he clenched the woman’s hand and looked up into her eyes. Tears of joy rolled down the eyes of the lady when the child, with an innocent smile on his lips, asked her – “Auntie, are you God’s wife”?

## **Ethics**

Ethics, also called moral philosophy, is concerned with conduct and character. It consists of principles and methods for distinguishing right from wrong and good from bad. *Ethics in theory* is the belief in principles of Rotary that they are the real standards of judging what is right? *Practical ethics* is the applicability of such principles to real life situations. In a dilemma ask a question to yourself - what should I do? And, find the answers on principles learnt in theory. Those who believe in religion, learn the principles of ethics and morality therefrom. For them they are the words



of God, generally expressed in religious books, which show the path of righteousness and enable solving of problems that arise in a social setting. In Rotary it can be the 4-way test.

Swami Chidananda, President of Divine Life Society, was a practical Vedantist who believed that service alone can purify and prepare the soul for contemplation on the deeper aspects of life.

The story is often recounted for how Chidananda found a leprosy-afflicted person on the Haridwar-Rishikesh road and carried him all the way to the ashram. He served him and took care of him as a mother would, her child. His untiring zeal in this regard resulted in the establishment of a lepers' colony in Rishikesh, which Swami Chidananda saw as a means of instilling self-respect and dignity among those suffering not just from the disease but also the stigma and ostracisation that went with it. This mission has become the core of his own teachings on sadhana. When once asked as to what was necessary to obtain the guru's grace, Chidananda immediately pointed out that path of selfless service or *seva* is what should be valued as the perfect sadhana.

These days Dhyana and Meditation are gaining popularity. Swami Chidananda says that yoga cannot stop at the psycho-physical level– the body itself has to transform into a vehicle of *sattva* or purity through *paropkara* or selfless service. This, in turn, will lead one to a meditative state: Dhyana or mediation is not possible without preparatory ethical disciplining of one's self.

The practical ethics of Rotary, which must ignite a spark in every Rotarian is–“ Let your example speak more than your words.... Reform yourself and be yourself what you want others to be. Live what you preach. Otherwise do not preach.”

There is a beautiful story told of a disciple of Lord Buddha who wanted to publish a book of the teachings of Buddhism. So, he spent several years compiling the great wisdom of Lord Buddha and placing it in book form. Then, it was time for the task of raising enough money to publish the book. He went door to door to his friends and neighbors requesting help in bringing this project to fruition.

After he had collected enough funds, he was about to publish the book when a large cyclone hit a poor area of the country. Immediately, he sent all the funds to the disaster-struck region to help the victims.

Again, then, he underwent the task of collecting money to publish this important book. Again, his friends, relatives and colleagues helped him reach the goal. Then, an earth-quake struck another area of the country, killing thousands. Again, the disciple sent all of his hand-earned funds to the region.

Several years passed during which he tried, with difficulty, to raise the funds a third time. However, people were not ready to keep giving for same book. Thus, it took him quite some time to raise enough money to publish the book. No catastrophe struck and the book was published. On the inside cover of the book beneath the title “Teachings of Lord Buddha” was written “Third Edition”.

So many times in life we read spiritual teachings, we listen to lectures and katha, we say our prayers. However, do we actually implement these teachings in our life? The book was a “Third Edition” because the teachings of Buddhism include compassion, non-attachment and service to the poor. Thus, by donating the funds for the book to disaster-struck victims, the disciple was, actually, teaching and illustrating the words of Buddha.

He knew that the word of Buddha was to help those in need. Thus, it is even more illustrative of Buddhism to help the poor than to publish books.

You have to act. The world and the society are full of challenges as sufferings to alleviate. Shiv Khera, an educator and motivator of international repute says- ‘it is never the *activity* of *rascals* that destroys a society, but always the *inactivity* of *good people* that does it’. Again he says- ‘if *injustice* is happening to your neighbor and you can *sleep, wait* for your turn. You are *next*.’

Friends, you are all leaders of Rotary World. A leader is one who knows the way, shows the way and goes the way. Albert Schweitzer, the great scientist/ humanitarian and honorary Rotarian once said- “Example is not the *main* thing to influence others; it is the *only* thing”. This period of time with D.K. Lee as Rotary International President and you all as leaders together will not come again. Think and act now. Kindle the spark of Rotary in every Rotarian and let the light of rotary, illuminate the world. According to Harry Truman- “A leader is a man who has the ability to get other people to do what they don’t want to do and like it”. And, Field Marshall Montgomery has said- “My own definition of leadership is this: The capacity and the will to rally men and women in a common purpose, and the character which inspires confidence”. Let every Rotarian be an example, a role model to the society to which he belongs. And we have done.

‘R-O-T-A-R-Y’, if every letter therein was to be assigned a meaning, it stands for “Rare Opportunity To Activate Real Yourself”, that is, your soul, your *atma*. Each one of you- the leaders- leads a team. What is a TEAM? ‘T-E-A-M’ stands for “Together Everyone Achieves More”. You have to lead the way of Rotary by igniting the spark of Rotary within each one of yourself. The gist of my entire talk before you today is- you have to put the soul of Rotary into your body of a Rotarian!

I would end by quoting an anonymous poem:

Through this toilsome world, alas!

Once and only once I pass;

If a kindness I may show,

If a good deed I may do

To a suffering fellow man,

Let me do it while I can.

No delay, for it is plain

I shall not pass this way again.

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