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Life - Insight

Beyond self-limit

We are gifted with two kinds of opportunities — self-created and life-created



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Whenever we're asked whether we can do something (especially a new task or challenge), we often hear ourselves saying these words:

"I think I can't..."

"I don't know..."

"Maybe I can or I cannot..."

"This is my limit..."

"I think I can... but..."

If we observe those responses they indicate the belief we have about ourselves — they are our 'self-limiting beliefs'. They block us from proceeding further, from experimenting beyond and finding out something new about ourselves. They prevent us from discovering our full potential. 'Discovery' means 'to expose something previously covered' or 'unearthing what is already there'. Therefore, 'self-discovery' means to expose ourselves to self-limiting beliefs and challenging them.

We are capable of most things but, generally, we are not aware of all the talents and skills we possess. Only by providing and allowing for opportunities to surface do we 'discover'. Predominately, there are two types of opportunities: self-created and life-created.

Self-created opportunities

One of the opportunities we can create for ourselves is to feel good about ourselves and the people around us. This translates into self-belief and belief in others. People often say, "I feel good about myself, but I don't feel good about people around me"; "I believe in myself but I don't believe in others." These are statements of contradiction, for if one feels good about oneself, one will also feel so about others. The reverse is also true. If we don't feel good about ourselves, we can't feel good about others. If we don't believe in 'us' we can't believe in others. Therefore, when you tell someone that you love him/her, it is because you see love in yourself. Likewise, when you tell someone "I see anger in you," it is because you see it in yourself.

In order to feel good and have self-belief we need to 'appreciate ourselves'. Appreciating oneself does not mean boasting, or imagining what is not there. It is about recognising the good qualities that we generally demonstrate, our strengths and past achievements — however small they may be.

When we 'appreciate ourselves' we feel good, as a result of which everything around us feels good.

Life-created opportunities

I was once asked by a friend, "Why does life keep on testing me, troubling me?"

This statement could be viewed as an expression of helplessness and of doubt. Life's way of creating opportunities is by testing us, thereby allowing us to learn and grow. These opportunities can manifest in various forms. It could come to us as an unexpected turn of events, plans that go astray, physical illness or even in the form of a natural disaster.

Although we might not think so at the time, if we are unconditionally accepting of life's experiences, we would learn many lessons. Our hidden potential could be discovered. A real-life event shared by N.R. Narayana Murthy, chief mentor and Chairman of the Board for Infosys Technologies, is inspiring in this regard.

In 1974, Murthy was hitchhiking through a place called Nis, a border town in former Yugoslavia (now Serbia and Bulgaria). Being a Saturday night, in a small town, most restaurants were closed. Also, without any local money, he had no way of finding food. He slept on the railway platform until the following night, when the Sofia Express pulled in. On the train the only passengers in his compartment were a girl and a boy. Murthy struck up a conversation with the young girl. She talked about the travails of living in an iron-curtain country, until they were roughly interrupted by some policemen. The young man seated near them believed they were criticising the communist government in power and summoned the guards.

The girl was led away; Murthy's backpack and sleeping bag were confiscated. He was dragged along the platform and confined to a small, 8x8 ft room with a cold stone floor and a hole in one corner that served as the toilet. He was held in that bitterly cold room without food or water for over 72 hours.

He lost all hope of ever seeing the outside world again when suddenly the door opened. He was dragged out unceremoniously and locked up in the guard's compartment on a departing freight train. He was told that he would be released 20 hours later, upon reaching Istanbul. The guard's final words, as Murthy later recalled, still rung in his ears: "You are from a friendly country (India) and that is why we are letting you go!" Murthy had no idea what became of that young girl.

The journey to Istanbul was lonely and he was starving. The long, cold journey forced him to deeply rethink his convictions about Communism. Early on a dark Thursday morning, after being hungry for 108 hours, he was purged of all affinity for Leftist thinking. After this experience, Murthy began to believe that entrepreneurship — rather than Communism — resulting in large-scale job creation, was the only viable mechanism for eradicating poverty. Deep in his heart, Murthy says, he always thanks the Bulgarian guards for transforming him from a confused Leftist into a determined, compassionate capitalist. He eventually went on to set up Infosys in 1981.

The story highlights the opportunity that life provided Murthy and the gift that had been offered, not only to him but also to many more lives.

When we go through this phase of testing and emerge successful, we discover new strengths open up within us as also new avenues to expand. Our belief systems transform to give us new meaning and faith in life. When the cover of 'doubt' is removed we find ourselves; we find our natural state of being, which is based on the pedestal of 'faith'.

A young mountain-climber, wearing a harness, was ascending a steep gradient one dark cold night. Suddenly he slipped and began falling. As he fell, he yelled for help. Soon he fell to a point at which the harness held and he was dangling helplessly. He yelled again and, in the darkness of the night, he heard a faint

voice saying, "Cut the rope!" He was doubtful and yelled for help again, fearful of cutting the rope.

The voice repeated its plea several times but the young man did not respond and continued to cry for help. In the cold of the night he died. The next morning, when the rescuers arrived they found him dangling two feet from the ground. If he had listened to the voice and cut the rope he would have been saved.

Life speaks to us, sometimes imperceptibly, to see if we are able to truly believe in it. This is an invitation to trust life, trust our own innate goodness; we will not be forsaken.

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