

We all need an exit

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In the epic Ramayana , written in Tamil by the famous poet Kamban, the poet endows Rama with the following approximate translation: when he lets Ravana off at the end of a day's battle, he says "Go today and come tomorrow". Some scholars have debated this. Yet there is little doubt about the good intent of Rama. He wants to give Ravana one more opportunity to withdraw from the battle gracefully, for defeat otherwise is certain. Ravana does not take the suggestion and the rest of the story is part of folklore.

As in the case of Ravana, we all need an exit, a possible route out of what might otherwise be an insurmountable situation, one in which we are sure to lose face or composure. No one, however wrong, wants to feel defeated. It is therefore the magnanimity of the other, recognising that the dialogue, debate or encounter is surely going to result in loss for one to allow the apparent loser to leave the intractable situation with his head held high.

When we so do, it gives both the warring parties an opportunity to re-examine their stand and alter it, if required, so that reconciliation may be possible.

A cat, when pushed against a wall, will try to exit the place if it can find such a way out. If it cannot, it will pounce on the invader. So is it with each of us. If we find no exit route, knowing we are cornered, we will react; yet if we find, even if only a small way to get out and restore face, we will opt for it. All relationships need such an exit possibility. If it is there we find that the probability of restoration after consideration is possible. If not, toxicity will set in and ruin any chance of restoration, reconciliation and even perhaps some resolution.

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