

HE MUST INCREASE & I MUST DECREASE

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As we enter into a new year we are tempted to take a look at our lives. Where were we during the past one year and where are we heading to in this new year? Where do our values and ideals take us to? Stories of two innocent girls can help us to peep deeply into our lives. The stories of these two little girls are well known as they were connected with a popular and much appreciated President of USA, Mr Abraham Lincoln.

I have read or someone has told me the story of the first girl. But without remembering her name I could not search and verify her story in the internet. Still her story is inspiring. Once her father took her with him when he went to meet the President Abraham Lincoln. The President welcomed very warmly both the man and his little child. After shaking hands with her father Lincoln turned to her. Saying “how are you my darling child?” Lincoln took her in his lap and started talking with her father.

The little girl sitting Lincoln’s lap said innocently. “Dad, dad, you were telling me that our President is an ugly-looking man and I should not get frightened. But, dad, our President is very beautiful and loving.”

A Greek proverb says: “Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.” The little girl recognized the beauty of life in the loving and caring behavior of Lincoln and she innocently proclaimed it. The second girl is Grace Bedell. I read her letter written on 18th October 1860 to President Lincoln on the internet. She wrote: “My father has just come home from the fair and brought home your picture... I am a little girl only 11 years old, but want you should be President of the United States very much.”

After observing Lincoln’s photo in all its details Grace courageously added in her letter “I have got 4 brothers and part of them will vote for you any way and if you let your whiskers grow I will try and get the rest of them to vote for you. You would look a great deal better, for your face is so thin. All the ladies like whiskers and they would tease their husbands to vote for you and then you would be President. My father is going to vote for you and if I was a man I would vote for you too but I will try to get everyone to vote for you.” (When this letter was written then in America only the men had

voting rights). Lincoln immediately replied to Grace and told her that he never in the past kept a beard. But after some time Lincoln did grow a beard. By the time he was elected as President of USA and he was on his way from Illinois to Washington he had a beautiful beard. Going by train Lincoln stopped at Westfield of New York to meet people.

In the crowd which gathered to greet him Lincoln called out Grace Bedell's name and lovingly greeted her with kisses.

Both the girls are innocent and without any guile. There is no trace of selfishness in them. No pretence. Both think about another person. They love the other. There is love in their hearts. They are warm. They are concerned. They express their appreciation. Above all, we can see a genuine virtue. In the letter of Grace Bedell: Her genuine interest in the well being of Abraham Lincoln. She not only desires the welfare of Lincoln but she also suggests that he takes concrete steps in that direction. Writing boldly a letter to an election candidate Lincoln, she gives concrete guidelines how to become popular with people and win the election.

When we peep into our lives we can ask a question to ourselves every day. Do we truly desire the well being and welfare of the people in our lives? Do we take specific steps exclusively in the interest of others? When we work selflessly in the interest of others, then we feel happiness in our hearts even if there is no appreciation and recognition of our work. We are delighted that we have been able to do something for others without any selfish motives. In the development and progress of person, family, society and of the nation there are people who genuinely work selflessly for the welfare of others.

In the growth and personality development of a child the parent's selfless love plays a very important part. The parents serve their child with love and dedication without any self interest. The parents willingly give up their own comfort and self-interest in the welfare of their child. Perhaps we may see some selfishness in parent's looking after their own child.

But we see that there was no trace of selfishness in writing a letter to Lincoln by the girl Grace Bedell. She wrote her letter seeing the ugly-looking photo of Lincoln. Then Grace did not expect a reply for the letter from Lincoln who is a very busy and much engaged person. So she wrote: "Have

you any little girls about as large as I am if so give them my love and tell her to write to me.” But replying himself Lincoln wrote her that he did not have any daughter but he has only three sons.

Works done selflessly with love for the benefit of others are always very fruitful. Perhaps some people may see such selfless work as useless because there is no appreciation or acknowledgement. Nevertheless there is goodness in such selfless acts of love. For, we are participating in the goodness of the Creator who does everything for the goodness of the whole humanity. So we become partners in the goodness of the Supreme Being – the Creator. In the words of Jesus, “I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did it for me!” (Mt. 25:40)

Finally, our reflection on peeping into our lives may be strengthened with an example from Alexander the Great. I do not know if the story is real or imaginary. One day Alexander felt that in spite of his many achievements one very important achievement is still left out. So he called a meeting of all his councilors, ministers and experts in different fields. Then he put a question to them all: “In our life what is the most valuable thing?”

An expert opinion that the most precious and valuable thing is the throne studded with jewels and pearls. Another one said: Your “Veena” which gives delightful music to our ears is the most valuable thing in the whole world.

The ministers, councilors, expert scholars gave a lot of different answers as to what according to each one was the most valuable thing in life. Finally a new entrant in the meeting of expert scholars said: “The most valuable thing in the world is the present moment. After the present moment passed us by we will never get it back.” The Emperor Alexander was happy with the answer of the young expert and honored him with many gifts and rewards.

Let us appreciate every moment of our life which we have got in this New Year. Let us make use of the present moment to do good to others. Thus if we give more importance to others than to ourselves, then our lives will be happy and fruitful during the whole New Year.

Last change: April 16, 2016

Next change on: May 1, 2016

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