

SEEKING ANSWERS

Original goodness: Fact or fiction?



NEVILLE HODGKINSON

Are human beings essentially good in character? Is love a fundamental principle in creation? Or is there truth in the concept of 'original sin', which has played a big part in much religious thought? On first glance, it might appear that these two ideas are opposites. In fact, both are true, but each applicable in its own time. There is truth in the 'original sin' concept but it only becomes useful when seen alongside our 'original goodness'.

Four fundamental teachings of the Brahma Kumaris help to illuminate the answer to this very old debate about goodness and sin within humanity.

The first is that spirit, or consciousness, is the deepest reality, and the material world is a secondary phenomenon. In this view, now gaining support at the frontiers of science, the world we experience is a consequence of consciousness, not a cause of it. Cosmologist and physicist Jude Currivan writes: 'Everything that manifests in the physical world emerges from deeper and ordered levels of non-physical and in-formed reality.' Or as the renowned Oxford psychiatrist and author Iain McGilchrist puts it: "Consciousness is the stuff of the cosmos."

A second, vital understanding is that from those "deeper and ordered" levels, nature is putting on



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a play. It has a beginning, middle and ending, but it runs in an eternal loop, or cycle: the end gives rise to the beginning.

Through our bodies, we act out our unique roles

on the stage of the physical world. But we too are consciousness, not primarily physical beings. This means that although there are times when we are 'off-stage', each one of us is also

eternal, like the play.

Our state of being, however, does change. Nature creates a perfect world, in which our original goodness manifests. But over time, we lose sight of our

spiritual essence, the well-spring of our love and happiness. We try to fill the gap left by this loss by indulging in physical satisfactions, and in particular by making demands on oth-

ers. The result is that our consciousness becomes increasingly trapped by matter.

This loss of awareness is what theologians have described as 'original sin'. However, just because goodness is not so much in evidence today, it does not mean there was never a time when everyone and everything in the world was good.

This third strand in understanding ourselves is immensely liberating, because it means we have the potential for perfection within us. Violence and suffering are a consequence of defects that entered our character over the course of the play, but they are not intrinsic to us.

Fourthly, and pivotal to the whole plot of the play, God does exist. Not as an old man in the sky, but as the force of love, who comes on stage when the actors are exhausted, and

desperate to taste their original goodness again. God is a being of pure and unadulterated consciousness. He reminds us how to live with love.

Desires have taken us far from our original goodness, but humans have not always been in this state, and we do not have to stay that way. St Augustine, an early Christian, wrote: 'In regard to mankind I have made a decision. On the one side are those who live according to man; on the other, those who live according to God.'

As I continue to practice meditation and enjoy an ever-deepening relationship with the Supreme Being, I find myself more and more able to 'live according to God', and know the reality of my original goodness. *Neville Hodgkinson is a UK-based author and journalist, and a long-time student of Rajyoga.*

CHALLENGING CONVENTIONS

SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE



B.K. SHEILU

The phrase 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do' means it is polite and possibly advantageous to abide by the customs of a society when one is a visitor. It is also taken to mean following others for the sake of conformity and convenience, and to avoid unnecessary exertions. In the latter, loose interpretation, it is adopted as a philosophy of life by many people.

A lot of us believe in following current trends

without using our scruples too much, as it is easier to go along with the crowd than invite curiosity, ridicule or opposition. It is an attractive proposition, as one can escape potential embarrassment and hostility. But such thinking, and course of action, also condemn us to mediocrity and are unlikely to help us achieve anything exceptional. Anyone who wishes to do something worthwhile in life has to do it on the foundation of sound principles and character. This may call for swimming against the tide.

It is values that make life worth living, and preserving them enriches life even if no one around us appreciates those values. One who embodies values is a source of strength and inspiration for others. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "Even if you are a minority of one, the



truth is the truth." Truth has such power that it manifests itself without anyone having to prove it. Living by high ideals may not be a bed of roses and one may have to face opposition for persisting on a path that looks irrational to others, but that is the price to pay for having a clear conscience and the knowledge and satisfaction that what one is doing is right.

There are examples in

history of men and women whose ideas and actions were little appreciated in their lifetime, but were later recognised as outstanding. Even man's scientific progress has been made possible by individuals who challenged prevailing dogmas and conventional ways of thinking to reveal the truth.

Modern scientific research and management practices encourage original and 'out of the box' thinking to find

innovative and effective solutions to problems. But while such nonconformity is welcomed for the practical benefits it brings, when it comes to upholding values that may not be fashionable, surrender is the first choice of many. This is because we do not recognise the value of what we are giving up.

Certain principles and values are what keep us human. Their benefits may be intangible at times, but together they form the foundation of a civilised society. The gradual abandonment of values in the pursuit of unrestrained self-indulgence is now recognised as a contributory factor behind some of the social ills afflicting modern societies.

When we swim against the tide to preserve and uphold values that we cherish and know to be right, we save ourselves from going

down the drain to decadence. Heeding our conscience and acting by our best instincts enhances our moral strength and power of judgment. This enables us to make the right choices in situations that test our character and good sense.

A sound character and judgment help keep us on the right track in life, saving us from mistakes that can ruin the lives and reputations of even brilliant individuals.

Following one's inner voice brings peace of mind as it averts inner conflict. This helps us remain stable, light and happy. And since truth cannot be hidden forever, siding with the truth ultimately, and always, brings victory.

B.K. Sheilu is a Rajyoga teacher at the Brahma Kumaris headquarters in Mount Abu, Rajasthan.

A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

The butterfly flies because it has let go of its caterpillar life. Before becoming a butterfly, the caterpillar passes through a stage of voracious eating which fuels the time spent in the chrysalis. On my spiritual journey, I too experience the appetite for spiritual input and enlightened ideas. For transformation to occur, I must use this valuable input as fuel for silent periods of solitude. This internal process may not be visible externally, but it is felt as a period of deep inner quiet. In solitude, I shed the old me, based on conditioned responses and old stories, and the REAL me emerges, free as a butterfly. Today let me feed inner transformation with solitude.

SELF-HEALING

MEDITATION HELPS HEAL PAINFUL PAST EXPERIENCES



DR. JUDITH KOCKEN

Most diseases are chronic rather than acute. Chronic means that there is no magic pill to cure the symptoms. Chronic diseases are a call of the body, in the form of a whisper or a scream, to the inner being, the soul. Chronic diseases are psychosomatic, meaning there is an imbalance between body and soul. A part of the cause is physical, in which the complaints are visible and can be measured or examined. The other part of the cause is not physical, because thoughts and emotions cannot be seen or measured, but can only be felt and experienced. A great many families are dysfunctional. Many of us have childhood experiences in which pain was felt, because what was needed

(being seen, valued, appreciated, loved, emotionally taken care of) was not available. This does not mean we all have had bad parents or are victims. When a child develops in a womb, the part of the brain that is developed first is the survival brain that activates the fight, flight or freeze response. Because of being dependent on caretakers as a child, when we needed something that was not available, a stress reaction was activated. As a result of that stress reaction and for protection from feeling hurt, we develop false beliefs: 'I am not good enough', or 'I am not lovable.' Those thoughts and beliefs give rise to chronic tension in the body.

We construct survival mechanisms which remain active in adult life. Any random person or situation can trigger one of these mechanisms, and we become angry, feel anxiety or panic, or we start pleasing or appeasing others. Self-destructive behaviour, such as drinking, gambling, overeating, and developing an inability to make decisions or form or maintain healthy relationships, can be an effect of chronic stress. All painful childhood



Meditation helps us to connect to the pain or tension in the body, and observe the emotion that is revealed, and a space for healing will emerge.

When we rediscover who we really are and are filled with pure energy during meditation, we are able to heal ourselves from painful past experiences.

memories are stored in the subconscious memory and have an impact on how we

react to people and situations. The mechanisms that were constructed will erupt

when triggered.

Healing is not a cognitive process. When a doctor or therapist asks what childhood experience is behind our reactions, it may be impossible to answer. When we practise meditation and mindfulness, we become more aware of our inner world. Meditation helps us

to connect to the pain or tension in the body, and observe the emotion that is revealed, and a space for healing will emerge.

Healing means allowing oneself to feel all emotions that are brought up by others. Other people are not in charge of soothing or attuning to our emotions. As we

learn to regulate the nervous system within and feel all the emotions that come up, we get a clearer idea of what we want and are able to communicate those needs.

Healing means restoring the relationship with the self. This does not mean that all diseases can be cured or that you are failing when the body becomes ill. Healing is a subtle process. Healing means acknowledging who you are, and learning to take responsibility for your own physical, spiritual, mental, emotional and social health. Being the one responsible for building a healthy relationship with the self and becoming clear about what you need, including from relationships with others.

When we meditate, we connect to ourselves, and to the source, the Supreme being. When we rediscover who we really are and are filled with pure energy during meditation, we are able to heal ourselves from painful past experiences. *Dr. Judith M. Kocken MD, PhD, is a paediatrician and a paediatric gastroenterologist. A pioneer in holistic healthcare, she studies and practises Rajyoga with the Brahma Kumaris in The Netherlands.*

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