

## **WHY THINKING ABOUT MEANING?**

From the evolutionary history of mankind we know that the primitive man had no investigative skills allowing him to reflect on the complexity of the surrounding world. For thousands of years people had just lived their lives instinctively, without any deeper knowledge of it. Dating from those earlier epochs, we inherited the tendency to apply our thinking to the question: 'How to live?', which is a perfectly legitimate way of thinking. Further on, other more detailed pragmatic questions were born, such as 'How Nature works?', 'How to organise societies?', 'How our bodies work?', 'How to build bridges?', 'How to build fast cars?', 'How to get to the planet Mars?' etc. These are those very practical questions, which today's scientists, engineers, economists, managers, and all kind of 'doers' of the world ask. What our civilisation considers as progress today is the result of work of those 'doers' of various kinds and of the technical, engineering, economic, organisational or scientific thinking they apply.

Once people understood the notions of physical creation, it became increasingly clear to them that although human beings are capable of creating and building things in their lives, they themselves did not invent our human species—rather, they understood, that they were a part of a larger creation, that they, in fact, were the instruments in 'the hands of the invisible Creator'. Discoveries like that inevitably led to the questioning of reasons for human existence, meaning of life and to the attempts at defining the value systems—hence they have led to the birth of philosophy.

When we talk about the birth of philosophy, it is not any particular event in history we are referring to. Philosophy is born in every human being when he or she becomes ready for a deeper understanding of life. When they become disillusioned with the predominantly materialistic approach to life, the deeper questions about the meaning of life and 'Why are we here?' will come to their minds. Historical records show that amongst most peoples there lived and taught wise men and women. These people, the upholders of deeper ancestral knowledge, were passing their wisdom and their value systems on to the consecutive generations. This system of passing on of oral spiritual tradition has survived in some communities until the present day.

In our modern society, driven mainly by technical knowledge, some materialistically oriented people question the validity and practicality of philosophy in our lives. Not knowing much about the depth of ignorance of their own psyche, they cannot see the driving force of arrogance that is in charge of their thinking. And it does not matter if they find themselves rewarded with a high societal status: if they are the CEOs, prime ministers or high level scientific

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advisors—their development as human beings has been arrested at the level of materialistic thinking.

Who can deny the role of Plato in the design of our Western civilisation? Why do we continue to revere his ideas? Whether people are aware of this fact or not, it was Plato and his followers, who provided many philosophical bases for our lives, the bases, which enabled the life of this civilisation to be distinguished from our savage past. If we follow the questions of philosophy, we discover the importance of the question of meaning. When we find the meaning and the long-term purpose of life, we become much better equipped to design and perfect our pragmatic solutions whether individual or societal. And our lives will have a much better chance to become less chaotic, short-sighted, painful and unrewarding.

Philosophical way of thinking about life can only become possible when a person's mind is capable of reaching higher orders of knowledge, rather than just those relating to the material survival. If a person's consciousness is not suitably developed, their thinking will not embrace philosophical concepts; their thinking is not prepared to allow these spheres of knowledge to reach their understanding. Anyone who pursues those deep inquiries is a better evolved human person. This statement does not automatically mean that all philosophers, the human species produced, were extremely insightful, or gave real treasures to humanity as Plato did. There are different levels of mind development amongst philosophers and the final proof of anyone's level of understanding lies ultimately with the generations to come, who will naturally have more evolved consciousness and will understand our contemporary thinkers better than we do. So, rather than rejecting the validity of the philosophical inquiry, we should acknowledge it as a frontier area of human knowledge; we should pay high respect to people capable of continuing and expanding this indispensable part of human endeavour.

It is now clear why in the long tradition of Hinduism, professions of philosophers were the most revered of all. Historically, philosophers, spiritual leaders and other learned men were elected to the most responsible positions within the Indian society. Ranking second was the profession of teachers, people who were educating and setting the minds of the younger generations. Any serious, not degenerated, society will act from the deep concern for the young, for the development of next generations. Such society will organise its institutions and give due emphasis to the importance of high value teaching. And of course, the salary structure for teachers must show this accordingly, because the society would want to attract the best and most talented people to the profession.

So, let us reflect where we, as a civilisation, currently stand on this matter. How do we value writings of our philosophers? Why bank managers earn fifty times more per annum than teachers? What does this reflect? How such examples affect the minds and hearts of the future generations of citizens? Is this not a sign of corruption in values of this civilisation? Why so many people who manipulate

the financial system continue to be rewarded? The system which rewards crooks and encourages cheating is dangerously degenerated. This situation points very clearly to the fact that the positions of power in some places have been taken over by people who most likely have low ethical standards (even if they are themselves not consciously aware of this fact). What they demonstrate in their behaviour and the decisions they make, is contrary to the values one hopes this civilisation should honour.

Our civilisation is driven by all sorts of 'dollar worshippers' and not by even the **basic** needs of its all citizens. Such priorities are highly non-spiritual. Today everything goes if money pays for it. One only needs to watch TV commercials to see how human vices are beings scrupulously exploited and popularised. Instead of promoting sound community values, the commercial television stations often flood us with examples of the lowest and most detestable human behaviours, which eventually find their ways to the mainstream of society, as a result of the inevitable 'copy cat' following.

But fortunately for us we also see examples of people who uphold the good values of this civilisation. Let us acknowledge the role of all benefactors, people who work for charities and scores of altruists, who through their efforts keep the spiritual values of this civilisation from collapsing. We have been blessed with their continuing presence and the continuing efforts to do what is right. Those benefactors who work truly for the good of civilisation, and not to make themselves feel good or to add another 'achievement' to the list the ego loves, are highly evolved as human beings. We also increasingly notice in the world around us that small numbers of highly evolved people, who do not shy away from philosophical thinking, are being placed in top positions of responsibility to organise and direct life of a country, and ultimately of our civilisation. Such people are in a position to directly apply the results of their inner inquiries.

So, as we can see, innate philosophical thinking is not the exclusive endowment of the philosophical profession. In fact it is paramount for every mature person living in our civilisation to rise to the level of asking philosophical questions about life and to look for answers. In this context the maturity is not necessarily related to the chronological age of the person; it is a measure of interest in the deeper questions of life, civilisation and the spiritual endowments of man.