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NANDAR THEIN ZAN

Translated by

MOE HEIN

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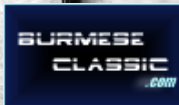
*Translated by*

**Moe Hein**

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This translation  
is dedicated to  
my mother and writer,  
*Journalgyaw Ma Ma Lay,*  
who knew of it  
but lived not  
to see the result.



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FOREWORD

I feel it a duty to inform the reader something about the author, his works, the original of this translation and how the translation itself came about. But should the reader wish to avoid being side-tracked by this foreword, he may best skip these pages. But when he has come to the end, he should flip back to this page so as to get a well-rounded picture.

The author, Nandar Thein Zan, is a man of letters. In the course of thirteen years before his first book was published in 1975, he had ploughed the literary field with his contributions. As essayist, translator and critic, his pen wandered in the world of periodicals. But not until his first book "Life, Its Meaning And Its Essence" came out did he win acclaim. At first, it was hardly expected that the



readers would interest themselves in a book with such an imposing title and an academic touch. However, to the surprise of all including the author, the book followed the river and found the sea. It came to be the rave of many a reader and critic. Nandar Thein Zan is also a man with a philosophic frame of mind. He got his Master's degree in Philosophy with credit. An assistant lecturer, he is presently teaching the subject in the Rangoon University. So it is not surprising that his works, altogether five now, centre on the subject in which he specializes. No less surprising is the fact that his pen hooked him from his desk and placed him on the podium. He became a much sought-after speaker. One finds him beyond the campus, giving occasional lectures and talks. So the writer, the scholar and the speaker have now merged into one.

About the original of this book, it is the fourth of his published works. First printed in 1979, new editions keep coming out yearly. This clearly shows how

much the book has captivated the hearts and minds of the Burmese readers. One reason may be that, unlike his former written works, this one is a compilation of his talks delivered extempore to a college gathering. So with this book, the reader's mind is not taxed with heavy reading but is easily carried along the current of his thoughts. From all that he had said, one can adduce the simple fact: "Life rests on the pivot of wisdom and effort." As regards his eloquence, I leave it to the reader's judgment. And as to what impact the book has, that too is left to the reader himself. I, for one, believe that it is the tonic of the times.

As for the translation, I have but little to say. Never had I imagined that I would be the one to translate this work. I had long yearned for someone to do so. It was only after the third edition came out with still no translation in sight that I felt impelled to take up the task myself. The original being an impromptu talk and, moreover, as Burmese and

English are different in syntax, it was quite a burden for me—an outsider in this field. But for the encouragement and guidance of writer Khin Zaw Wun of Bauktaw, Rangoon, this work would not have come through. I am greatly indebted to him. My thanks are due also to my colleague, May Pyone Han of 33rd Street, Rangoon, for her patient typing. I hope the readers will enjoy this work as much as his auditors do Nandar Thein Zan's talks. If so, I would be happy to feel that I've done some service.

MOE HEIN  
30-7-83

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## INTRODUCTION

In ancient times, ships plied the seas with huge sails. One unlucky day, a ship was caught in a storm. So, the captain ordered a young sailor to climb up the mast and pull off a rope. The wind was wild, blowing in gusts. No matter, the young sailor climbed up the mast and did his duty without a wince.

When he was about to descend, he looked down and saw the ship reeling in the fury of wind and waves. What a calamity! Seeing everything from above, he shuddered with fright. He lost grit and almost collapsed. So, he cried out to his mate below, "Oh! I'm going to fall, help me! help me!"



His mate from the deck shouted back, "Don't look down, look up! look up!"

Taking the advice of his friend, the young sailor looked up. Thus he stopped seeing dreadful things below and was relieved. His mind became calm and steady and once again, courage prevailed. Only then could the young sailor manage to reach the deck.

It is the same too in our voyage of life. When things don't go well, end up with failure, and hopes are lost, our energy is drained away. We lose stamina and feel disheartened to attempt again.

We become dejected with such thoughts as "I can't carry on anymore," "I have failed," "I am done for," "This is the end." The more depressing the thoughts, the more dejected we become and the farther success recedes. By this we can gain next to nothing.

So, whatever obstacles there may be in our way, no matter how disappointed we

are, we have to surmount them. With chins up, we must look ahead to our cherished goal of better life. In other words, we must be ever alert and diligent.

My main purpose here is to give you advice. Should your life-passage be as rough and stormy as mine, then like that young sailor on the deck, I wish to say: "Don't look down and feel depressed, look up!" I say so as your travel-mate.

By saying so, please don't think that I consider myself to be a veteran of life's battles. No, I am not. I am merely passing along, as encouragement, such nuggets of life's experiences as I have noted or heard from those who have gone ahead of us. You may well have heard of them. Be that as it may, to hear once again is to impress once more upon the memory.

As for those lucky ones who are successful, I hope my words will help them enjoy a better life and become more successful.



## CHAPTER I

### Pertaining to Wisdom....

One thing in life that we never wish to face but have to, is suffering. No one would welcome 'suffering'. But one has to suffer. No one would pray, "May I suffer," "May I never part with suffering." Even without such prayers, the wish is answered. Why? Because suffering is everywhere and we are always in its company.

Indeed, life is beset with suffering. It appears as hardships or dangers and also in other forms, say like cruelty, iniquity, injustice and so on.

Then what happens when people suffer?

Some become disappointed and are driven to despair. They believe that such dangers and tribulations are the fruits of the past ill fate. And, if the tide of life is in their favour, that too, they see it as the result of the past good fate. Everything is attributed to the past. Whether a man's life be good or bad, smooth or rough, all depends on the past. If we accept this view, we would be entirely accepting 'Fatalism' which beholds only the past.

There are others who take such sufferings, troubles and failures as God's will. Some, however, are sceptical. They implicitly question God, "Why does God want us to face these dangers and tribulations?" The believers in Creation are not so different from those who are pinned to 'Fatalism'. By this, one could become a weakling and easily surrender to the stern challenge of life. By ignoring the virtues of the present *i.e* wisdom and diligence, one loses confidence and becomes a waverer. What a pity to forsake one's own life!

In times of peril, some act impulsively. Doing things without reasoning, there can be errors. These actions can become rash, arising from stark fear. And in the world today, there are those who out of panic resort to terrorism as means of solving problems. Problems cannot be overcome by mere violence. Indeed it is hard to succeed. When people don't succeed, they lose grit and resolution and start to waver. A weak and vacillating mind turns to 'Nihilism' that regards life as absurd and useless. So, if one sticks to wrong views then opinions and conclusions would be wrong too.

When we are in trouble or danger, we must have a right attitude and outlook, free from extremes. We must find out the root cause of the matter and be able to tackle it. Regarding this point, I remember a story.

One day, while searching for food, a small quail was caught by a hunter. The latter earned his living by catching



quails alive and selling them to people who relished quail-flesh.

The hunter took the little quail and put him in the cage with other quails. He fed the quails well to make them fat and appetising. Only then would the customers be tempted to buy.

Any quail that landed in the cage, would, in short time, surely die in the hands of the buyer. These poor creatures seemed to be waiting inside the cage for their inevitable death. Our little quail well knew the consequences. But unlike his companions, he did not resort to force. He knew it would be futile. The rebellious quails in their revolt maimed themselves and finally died of exhaustion. How could they free themselves from this unbreakable cage by sheer force? He was aware of the close peril while others felt unconcerned. These quails devoured everything that the hunter gave. And they were even hilarious. Unlike some who felt helpless and left everything to fate, he did not

feel dejected. With a fixed mind he was thinking, "How can I escape?"

A plan dawned on him. He deliberately ate just enough to save his breath. Reducing food to that level, his little body shrank and became frail.

Now that he had become skinny, he caught no one's attention. So, no one bothered to buy him. In fact, that was a blessing itself. He had more time to concentrate and plan.

At last, he alone was left in solitude. Seeing him, the hunter thought, "I have fed him but why doesn't this little creature turn fat? And he appears so wretched, perhaps of a disease."

So he took him out of the cage, put him in his hand to inspect the little bird's malady. In such condition, he never expected the frail bird to fly and flee. So he was casual. But the vigilant little quail suddenly took the opportunity and flew away. He headed for the forest where his friends were. In such way, the

little quail escaped from the jaws of death. Well, if he had left everything to fate and become depressed, there would have been no chance of survival. Or had he relied on force, he would have died of exhaustion. Perhaps the hunter might have lost his temper for being so persistent and would have killed him.

When he reached his place, his friends were agog to hear his news. Where had he been and what happened? The little quail told everything he had experienced: "Friends," said he, "One who is not prudent never benefits. Look what I have come across. Because I am astute and able to foresee things, I have passed through the ordeal."

So in life, it is very important to be wise. Shortly put, wise thinking is essential.

When we are thrown into hardships and are not perspicacious then we won't be able to decide what to do and how. We would waver.

Here also, let me give an account of

a lady named Kondala Kathi, from the Buddhist Text.

The lady was the daughter of a very wealthy person. One day, as she was gazing at the scene outside her window, she saw a man being dragged by guards. He was a thief already sentenced to death. Instantly, she was seized by passion for the thief. So she approached her father and told him that she wanted to marry the thief. If not granted, she insisted that she would die. The father strongly dissented and made her listen to reason. But it was useless for she appeared she wouldn't budge an inch from marrying the thief. The father loved his daughter so much and for the sake of her happiness, he bribed the guards to release the thief. Then he took him to his house and married his daughter to him.

Before long, the thief became tired of his wife. He longed to carouse with his old friends. And being a kleptomaniac, he had an itch to steal.



So one day, he lied to his wife and said: "My dear, when I was tied and dragged by the guards, I vowed to the Nat\* of the pit where thieves are thrown to die that I would go through the rituals and make offerings if I were saved. Because of this, I escaped death and we were married. So we must go and pay obeisance. And when we go, do wear your precious jewels."

The thief's motive was to take the jewels and push her down the pit when they reached the top. Then he would go where he wished. The wife agreed, taking his words to be true.

The fateful day arrived. The wife put on her best dress, summoned the servants, took along some offerings for the Nat and set out together with the husband. When they reached the foot of the mountain, the husband said:

"My dear, leave the servants here, just the two of us must climb."

\* A supernatural being.

Only if the two went up could he carry out his plan. The wife left the servants behind as her husband instructed and the two went up the mountain.

Reaching the top, the thief showed his true colours. He said: "Now, take off your jewels, I have brought you here to kill you." So saying, he forced her to take off her possessions.

How inhuman it was! Actually, the lady was his saviour. He owed his life to her. And she had been a faultlessly devoted wife. She reminded him of how great her love for him was and pleaded for her life. But no mercy was shown. Perhaps her doomsday had come. So she gave up, and finally begged:

"Dear husband, I adore you so much, this will be my last time seeing you. Before I die, may I embrace you and bid farewell."

The husband relented. As was the custom of those times, she started circling him from the right and then embraced him front and back. The husband took

these as gestures of deep sorrow. But it was, in fact, a ruse. Taking him by surprise, she pushed him down the pit.

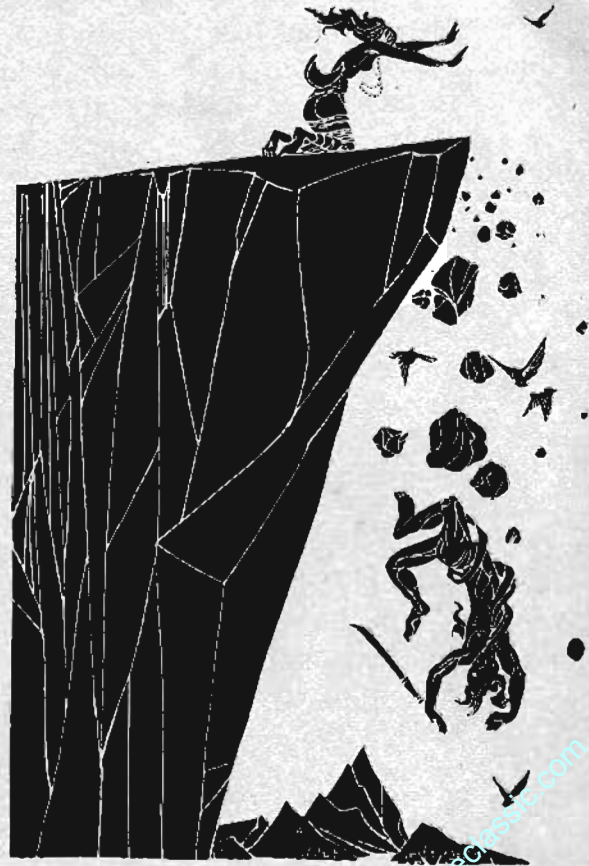
The thief slammed himself against the rocks, broke his bones and died. Naturally, she had done what she did according to circumstances. The thief deserved to be killed. When one is alert and intelligent, one can take prompt action.

Some time later, the lady became an Arahāt.\* She was praised by Lord Buddha as one who distinguished herself in instant wit.

What we need is a right view and right knowledge. It is easy to glorify wisdom with words but difficult to attain, a thing too far for words to reach. We must be vigilant and look forward to experience and learning. All our work must pertain to it.

Sometimes, social problems are more difficult to solve than scientific problems. Concerning this, I recollect an episode

\* One freed from all defilements.



according to circumstances



that Thingaza Sayadaw \* related. Perhaps the Reverend wanted to show how futile wrong actions are.

It was during the time when Majestic Mandalay was the Capital of Old Burma. A mother, wanting to show off her daughter's flawless beauty, dressed her elegantly and took her to town. Both felt buoyant. Beautiful indeed was the daughter, capturing the gaze of the passers-by. And the mother was very pleased about it.

While thus strolling, they were unexpectedly caught in a whirl-wind. How unfortunate! The wind blew off the young lady's 'htamein'—lower garment. How ashamed she would be! To cover her daughter's shame, the mother immediately took off her own and put it on her daughter. But as she was in such a haste, it could not be done quickly, perhaps the size of the 'htamein' being not like today. So both the mother and daughter were momentari-

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\* An eminent writer (AD 1815-1886)  
Burmese Encyclopaedia Vol: 13, Pg-211.

ly uncovered. Seeing the two thus, people nearby could not suppress their laughter.

Regarding the incident, some people suggested that the mother should not have taken off her 'htamein' for the daughter, because by so doing both were uncovered.

"Then, what should have been done if the mother was not to have taken off her garment?" asked someone.

"The mother should have run after her daughter's garment and retrieved it for her. Shame for the daughter only, not for both," was the reply. Yet some proposed: "The mother should have embraced the daughter as cover and asked someone near to run for the garment."

But if the people around were gentlemen,\* who would want to retrieve a lady's 'htamein'? None. How then must the problem be solved?

Of course, opinions will differ.

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\* In those days, gentlemen were wont to avoid handling womens' nether garment.

What I want to stress here is that sometimes social problems are more delicate to solve than scientific problems which are generally regarded subtle. In tackling these problems, one must be prudent, vigilant and decisive. We must be thoroughly prepared. That is the point I wish to emphasise.

In the case of scientific matters, there are certain laws and principles which can be relied upon for solving problems. 'Control systems' and thorough tests can be applied. But in social problems, there is no fixed criterion. They cannot be put under 'control systems' and verified. That is why one must be very tactful in handling them.

How hard it is to cope with these problems that require prudence and vigilance. Certainly, those who have to guide people, those who have to rule or who have to lead, are well aware of the immense difficulties.



Once again, as it is relevant, I wish to quote some points from an epistle tendered by Kandaw Min Kyaung Sayadaw, the poet, to King Mingaung the II of Ava period.\* The Venerable stressed the need for wisdom and vigilance in coping with problems. Here are the points:-

Some matters need prompt action whereas others need time. Mistakes are made when things one should do slowly are done hastily. So also, there will be mistakes and shortcomings if urgent matters are not done instantly. As there is no fixed principle regarding this, one must weigh the matter carefully and act.

Regarding the degree of offence, some are major and some minor. Hence punishment should be meted out in commensurate with

\* AD 1480 Burmese Encyclopaedia Vol: 1,  
Pg. 360-361.

the degree of offence. Similarly, matters that one should seriously do or say should be done or said accordingly. But what should be done or said lightly should be dealt with as such.

Some cases need to be tackled flexibly but some firmly. To be flexible or firm depends on the condition. But that does not mean that one must take extreme measures in either case. It must be approached objectively and dealt with appropriately.

It is also necessary to rightly assign persons to their tasks. There are those who can be entrusted with important tasks and others who can be given only simple ones. Furthermore, one must be able to draw the line between essential and non-essential work, between primary and secondary factor.

Whatever the case may be, we must try under any circumstances to see things in their right perspective and decide correctly. We must be able to foresee the possibilities and try to grasp knowledge of things and events yet unknown to us.

As the Reverend pointed out, we are urged to acquire full knowledge and wisdom on these matters so as to avoid confusion and problems. He again emphasised his points, giving the following similes:-

Just as we carefully weigh gold to get its exact weight, so also certain things must be done with care, neither too slow nor fast.

Just as the boat is balanced on both sides for smooth sailing, so also actions should be neither too rigid nor too loose to get good results.

Just as a fisherman loses the fish either by pulling the cord too



*just as we weigh carefully*



slow or by pulling so fast that it snaps; but catches the fish by good manoeuvre, so also should we avoid the extremes to succeed.

That is the Venerable's message.

So, we have to thank the sages who from time to time urged: "Man must seek reason." In fact, we are never fully vigilant. We are truly indebted to them for their advice given for our own good. From these advice, as well as from our reason and experience, theories and guidelines will be drawn to serve us as torch-bearers.

But it cannot be claimed that all problems would be solved just by the help of such theories and guidelines. This is because from them we cannot definitely say what lies ahead. Of course, in the future there will still be errors, shortcomings and blighted hopes. We shall no doubt suffer. That is why some people from the East are not content with mere reason and intellect but are intent to acquire intuition or intuitive

knowledge. They are keen to acquire definite knowledge of the future rather than to speculate upon it. But I have rarely come across a person with such super-knowledge. Some scientists too are trying to forecast the future precisely with the help of instruments. However, we cannot definitely say what will happen in the future, nor do we have the means to prevent it.

So, for the present, we are obliged to depend on reason and intellect and step forward. When problems arise, we have to settle them prudently. Surely, mistakes will occur and things will also be against our wishes. And along with them, sufferings and woes. But just because of these mistakes and shattered hopes why should we blurr our future with wavering? Should we lose heart? Never! Learning from these bitter experiences, we have to push ahead. So, travel mates, I wish to encourage you and say: "Carry on with guts."

x

x

x

## CHAPTER II

### An End to Wavering

If we don't have a correct outlook, if we lack prudence, we wouldn't know what to do and become depressed. In a world so chaotic and challenging, if the mind is not resolute then one finds it depressing everywhere.

That is why some have labelled the present age "The age of Depression". Philosophers also have given numerous definitions on 'man'. As one put it, "Man, is a worried creature in this age".

True indeed, as the world is beset with worries, mental depression has become a common malady nowadays. England alone annually has about 40,000



patients suffering from it. And in England alone too, there are annually about 5,000 people who commit suicide, amongst whom mental patients rank the most.

When one is depressed, taxed with worries, various diseases can crop up. Regarding this, researchers have claimed that about 50% to 70% of patients suffer from diseases because of mental depression.

In the United States too, about 4 million people have to undergo treatment for depression yearly. It came out in the Time's Medicine section (round about '77) that 250,000 of them were hospitalised.

So, inspite of hardships and worries, we should not despair but should boost up our morale. All of you must have seen a 'Pyit-taing-htaung.'\* Probably, you have played with it in your childhood. Throw it whichever way you like, it always stands right side up.

\* Roly-poly.

Like the Pyit-taing-htaung, we should have guts and forever be 'ups', come what may. History is replete with people, so brave and wise, who had withstood challenges, undaunted. Compared with them, your troubles are mere trifles.

Of course, you have heard of Prince Maha Zanecca.\* Sometimes, when we are in a fix, we think of him and get inspiration. As you all know when there was shipwreck, others panicked. Some prayed to their Nats or Guardians for succour. Not knowing what to do, some wept and yelled in distress. But Maha Zanecca was unperturbed, being iron-willed. When nothing could be done to help others, he prepared for himself. He ate well consuming quite a lot of butter and smeared his body with butter and fats he could find. Then he climbed up the mast. His mind was calm and steady, so he could clearly see things,

\* The would-be Buddha.

think over them and decide what to do. There was good reason why he climbed to the top of the mast. When the ship's hull broke and people fell overboard, sharks came to the ship to attack them. These blood-thirsty creatures dashed towards the drowning men. If the Prince were amongst them, he would have been gobbled up no matter how swift a swimmer he may have been. Knowing so, Maha Zanekka climbed up the mast and dived as far away from the sharks as he could. From then on, he challenged the sea and swam relentlessly. Imagine him swimming the seas—the world's unbeatable swimmer, swimming for seven whole days. As a tribute to his indomitable courage and perseverance, he was helped by Manimaykhala, Goddess of the Seas.

If Maha Zanekka had panicked like others, he would not have been able to judge things clearly and decide promptly. Without wisdom, no proper decision can be reached. And if he had lost his morale, it would have been absolutely



*his mind was calm and steady*



impossible for him to swim for seven whole days. By merely being depressed his hope for survival would have vanished.

So, whatever happens, we must screw up our courage and not lose our head.

After the first World War, Marshal Foch was asked how he had commanded in the war.

"I did," replied he, "what I had to, calmly smoking my pipe."

Military commanders who issued orders after carefully studying conditions and information; brave soldiers who fought to win the enemy and able statesmen who overcame crises, were all steady-minded.

It is hard to judge a person whether he is efficient or not, good or bad, without having seen him go through hardships, dangers or crises.

There is a saying: "A man's ability is known and tested only in times of stress."

So a person may be held in high esteem without his ability been proven but

one cannot be sure of his ability. Only when one passes through ordeals and survives then can he be fully commended. The same applies to the question of judging a person whether he is good-hearted or not.

At a time before Lord Buddha attained Enlightenment, there was a lady named Vadaihika. She was admired for her impeccable character, good temperament and kindness. The neighbourhood was full of praises for her: "Oh! Vadaihika is noble-minded," "well spoken," "gentle and mild," "very hospitable and clever," "how noble she is!"

And in Vadaihika's house, there was a maid named Kali. Wherever Kali went, whoever she met, she always heard good words about Vadaihika. So Kali thought, "Is it true that my mistress is really good?" "Or is it because I have worked so well for her that she has nothing to worry about?" "Ah! I must find out." She was burning to know the truth. One day, Kali deliberately failed to wake up early as usual to do the housework.

When the mistress woke up and looked about, she saw that the water for washing her face was not ready yet. In the kitchen too, nothing had been prepared and the floor unswept. So she thought, "Kali hasn't woken up, her morning chores untouched — perhaps she isn't well". She was not angry at all as there was no reason to be so. "May be she is ill," thought Vadaihika pitying her even.

Thinking her to be ill, Vadaihika went to Kali and asked: "What is wrong, aren't you well?" Replied Kali, "Nothing's wrong, it is just that I want to sleep."

Vadaihika said nothing but there appeared a flicker of anger in her face. Kali noticed it and thought, "Oh! our mistress can be angry but I'd better make sure". The next day also, she purposely did not get up from bed early. And Vadaihika came to ask as before.

"I am sleeping," replied Kali, "because I wish to sleep so, mistress." Vadaihika was incensed by the flippant re-



ply and threateningly said, "I'll show you my mettle".

Now, Kali saw that the 'gentle Vadaihika' had begun to use harsh words. To make doubly sure, she did not get up the next day too. Vadaihika came to ask as before.

"I am sleeping because I don't want to get up," snapped Kali. Vadaihika could not contain herself anymore. She was furious. Out of temper, she threw the bolt at Kali, making her head bleed.

So Kali went about the neighbourhood complaining: "Look what happened to me!" she wailed. "In the house, I am the only one to toil and must I be beaten brutally just for not getting up early? How could everyone say that Vadaihika is benevolent, polite, hospitable and benign? Now look at me, must your ideal lady be so rude to throw the bolt at poor me." "Oh! how my head hurts."



*to go through thick and thin*

Only then did people come to see the other side of Vadaihika.

From this story, what can be adduced is the fact that one's true nature can be seen only in the face of unpleasantness. The same is true, for married life. Wealth and rank enlivens it. The wife getting what she wants, adores the husband. Love reflects in every gesture. She would be looked upon as a faithful wife, ready to go through thick and thin. But once they are caught in the clutch of hardships and poverty, love flees. The wife, once tender, starts to use harsh words and becomes petulant.

There is a saying that a true wife is one who shares with the husband all fortunes and misfortunes, and there is little wonder that a rich man has many a wife.

So a lover's fidelity, a comrade's trust-worthiness and a friend's loyalty can be judged during hard times. Very true, all types of pain and hardships are



nothing but a 'litmus-test' that reveals a person's true ability and character. What is more, we have to ask ourselves, "How much can I tolerate suffering, to what extent can I endure ?

Said a person: "Troubles and hardships are just like the hot season, which can turn milk sour just as it can ripen fruits."

The same holds true with people. One whose mind is not strong enough to face overwhelming odds will be crushed and defeated. But those who are iron-willed, and steadfast, will overcome the challenges. They are the outstanding ones.

So we'd better summon up courage to face the challenges and conquer them. It is a 'must!'

x

x

x

## CHAPTER III

### The Voice of Travellers

If we don't have a right view, if our mind is not firm then our desires and hopes will fade away. We are demoralised by such thoughts as.... "I won't be able to get this," "That is impossible," "I will never succeed."

A person once said that from life travellers the following voices can be heard, namely, 'Must be!', 'Is it possible?' 'Impossible'.

The first voice is that of the one who will succeed, and this is because he is resolute. The second voice belongs to the one who will fall short of his goal, short of success, for he is doubtful when about

to do some work. As for the third voice, it is that of the one who loses hope from the very beginning and, doing nothing, achieves nothing. What can be expected of someone who has no self confidence at all?

Once, Napoleon sent his engineers to explore possible means for his troops to cross the St. Bernard Pass. When they returned, Napoleon asked: "Is it possible to cross the path?" "Perhaps," was the hesitating reply, "It is within the limits of possibility." What do you think Napoleon did?

After full investigation, he instantly issued his order to the troops, "Forward!"

Napoleon never flinched, he was decisive and free from doubt. In fact, he was strongly convinced of the success of his plans. He even declared. "The word 'impossible' does not exist in my dictionary." That was why unlike his engineers he was not doubtful. If there was a possibility, he would decide that obstacles were surmountable. As the world knows,

Napoleon's army successfully crossed the dreaded St. Bernard Pass.

Nelson, the British admiral, who valiantly fought in the Battle of the Nile, did somewhat the same. Before the battle, Nelson explained his carefully formed plan. "If we succeed, what will the world say?" asked Captain Berry. His word 'if', implied something less convincing.

"There is no 'if' in this case," replied Nelson. "That we shall succeed is certain."

When the meeting ended and the captains rose to return to their respective ships, Nelson added: "Before this time tomorrow, I shall have gained a peerage or Westminster Abbey." That meant 'honour' or 'death.'

As Nelson was confident, he won a glorious victory.

So is there a similar case in our Burmese history. Bayint Naung\* fought

\* Monarch (1551-1581 AD).



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the Naungyo Battle with no less conviction and resolve.

Thus, one who is resolute can raise high the banner of hope. If desires are truly intense then with intellect and morale we can overcome the odds. Sure enough to reach the goal.

For those who struggle through life, they must have a will and must have an aim. Without purpose or aim, one reaches nowhere. If you don't have a goal or say, a well defined purpose then the path you tread will lead you astray.

Once, a master sent for his two boys. When both arrived, he took one into the room and left the other outside. And in the room, he said:

"My boy,—never utter a word to your friend outside of what I am going to tell you. Even if you meet him anywhere, you must say nothing of it. Now, promise me that you will keep it to yourself."

The young man promised. Then the master continued: "Well, what I am going to tell you is that tomorrow with full provisions you must go to the eastern forest. When you reach there, do your best to find out leaves and roots suitable for medicine. If your friend takes notice of your interest, tell nothing about it. Only when you return, you have to tell me everything you observed. Also bring back as many as possible samples of leaves and roots fit for medicine. That is all, now you can go."

So saying, the master set the date for his return and dismissed him.

When this boy left, the master summoned the one outside and said: "My boy, do not say anything to your friend who has just left about what I am going to tell you. Wherever you meet him, promise me that you won't utter a word about it."

The latter also promised and the master again continued: "Well, tomorrow with full provisions you must go to the

eastern forest. When you reach there, try your best to fetch woods suitable for a building that can withstand the rigours of weather. Bring along also as much as possible some samples of them. When you come back, you must report to me everything. That is all, you can go." The master set the date for his return and dismissed him too.

And so the next day, the two boys set out separately to the eastern forest with their provisions. They met on the way. Naturally, each wanted to tell the other what was on his mind. It is human nature to want to tell when asked to keep a secret. But as they had promised their master, they said nothing and just entered the forest.

Reaching there, they looked for what they had to, took what was necessary for samples and returned on the appointed day.

The master together with his other pupils welcomed them. He made them wash, take a rest and fed them well.

When night fell, he took them to the Assembly Hall. Other pupils had been ordered to gather there too. So when the two arrived, all were present. Then the master gave a speech.

"Boys, look at the things that these two have brought back from the forest. What one brought are different from those the other did. One has brought samples of leaves and roots fit for medicine whereas the other has brought fine samples of wood fit for building, the kind that can stand the season. I set them to their tasks according to their efficiency as I judged. They have done well and have brought back very useful records and samples."

So saying the master also revealed how he had secretly ordered them. He continued:

"The reason why I kept my orders secret has no other purpose than to teach the two as well as all of you here a lesson that man becomes what he wishes and what he aims, as his mind dictates.



That is the point I want to stress. The first boy fixed his mind on finding leaves and roots good for medicine, according to my instruction. As his mind was bent on that, both body and mind functioned to fulfil the task. So he got all the facts and samples for medicine."

"The other boy also followed my instructions. He set his mind to finding woods suitable for building and good enough to stand the weather. As his mind was intent, both body and mind concerted to fulfil the task and he also got facts and samples of them."

"Boys, the two went to the same forest and their eyes saw the same things. Although the same objects reflected upon their retinas, the two boys differed in attention, observation and knowledge. Where one directed his mind to search for medicinal plants, the other would not know and see as he did. What he had collected would be different from the other. Similarly, the one whose mind is confined to searching for fine wood would differ in

all respects from his friend. The difference lies in attention, desire and aim."

"Should a woodcutter be in their company, the same things would reflect in his eyes and he would see just like them. But his attention would be different. And as his desire would be to fetch a kindle, his mind would dwell upon it. So he would choose wood good enough for a kindle and cut them. What can be seen is that the body and mind would react in concert with a person's intent and desire."

"What I mean is where the mind leads life follows. If you want to be a specialist in the field of medicine and have a strong desire, you will become so. Similarly, if you have a will to excel in forestry and live up to that will, you will do so. But for one who lacks desire, he becomes nothing. We must have a high and noble ambition. Our mind must be determined to reach our goal. If the will is strong, anything can be

achieved. That is what I want to advise you."

But in real life, expectations don't always materialise and unexpected things occur. What we wish to become we don't and what we don't wish to become, we do. That being so, our desires falter and our hopes flee. We give up again and again. Apart from being disheartened and miserable, there is nothing to gain. As it is better to strengthen our mind, we have to bolster our spirits.

There goes a saying: "He who carries his hopes high through the night but abandons them at dawn remains in the dark the whole day in spite of the sun shining bright."

We have to cling to our hopes till the time the rays of success unfold. A person once put it: "Lofty aims are like the stars above. It is not easy to get there. But the night travellers in the desert or at sea can make out the directions by reading the stars, and reach their destinations.

Just the same, though our 'ideals' may not be realised, having a lofty aim would be conducive to good conduct anyway. What is more, if the mind is set on these aims, we wouldn't act from base motives and we wouldn't be unscrupulous. Never would we have a wretched life. Confident of this, we must strengthen our morale.

True, one having a low aim has low morality and can become vile. Regarding this, a sage gave the following parable:—

Once a lion scratched at the hole on a mountain side. Inside it was a mouse he wanted to eat. As the hole was on the rocky surface, he cut his claws. Even if he had laboured hard, what would the prize be? Just a mouse. Not worth eating.

Actually, no mighty lion would ever dine on scraps nor depend on others for food. A mighty lion relies on itself and preys only on big animals. In spite of being a mighty creature, this one was



going in for a mouse. How hollow is the dignity of a lordly lion. Just like the lion, some people can perform noble deeds and yet, lacking morality and purpose, they turn despicable. They go beyond the bounds of decency. So we must have a lofty aim, a noble aim. Only then would we accomplish good deeds and deserve credit.

No matter how strong our desires, no matter how resolute we are, things may not turn out as we expect them to. Never mind, according to the true spirit of a lion that will never eat grass or prey on a mouse, we must also be resolved never to do vile things even at the risk of our lives. And even if we died in the process, it would be a noble death. That was what the sage meant by his parable.

Common people who do not aim high attempt nothing great and remain mediocre. There is not much failure or success in their lives.

But for one to become outstanding, or great, he must not fear the odds, be they



*the true spirit of a lion*

great or small. Nothing must shake the will to struggle. Even if one fails, one must bear in mind the teaching from the 'Hitawpadaytha'\* : "Fulfillment and loss belong to the great. At times the moon is full and at times the moon wanes—but not the stars." With this in mind, one must keep on striving. To be above the mediocre, one has to pay the price. So we must be resolved and energetic to reach our goal. Never fret in the face of danger.

I am reminded of what Bernard Shaw once said: "In this world, there is always danger for those who are afraid." So if we think of dangers, there is no end to fear. And as the world is full of troubles and dangers, no doubt we shall come across them in one form or another. We overcome one only to encounter another.

Once, there was a man whose hairline on his forehead receded and he finally became bald. He was so ashamed

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\* A compilation of wise sayings and adages.



of his shiny pate that, to cover up his shame, he kept saying to the people he met, "Ah! being bald I have less trouble combing hair." Until he was squelched by someone whose rejoinder was: "Yes, but as your hair-line has receded so has your forehead widened and that you now have more trouble washing your face!"

This happens everywhere. Barely has one trouble or danger passed, another looms ahead to take its place. Such is the law of life. True, just when one work is over, there is another on hand. Just when one is relieved of one task, another falls on the shoulder. And if we try to avoid these, sure enough in the next bend we would land up with something worse. One who is reluctant to learn at young age and turns his back on school may feel free for the present. But in the future, he will become jobless not having proper education; and without knowledge and skill he will have to live on the border-land of want and woe,

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*nothing was left on the table*

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what a pity! So we must all do what we have to.

This reminds me of the great author, Mark Twain and his house lad.

One morning, Mark Twain having dressed, was about to go out. He looked for his shoes and saw that they were dirty with mud. He called the lad and asked, "Why didn't you shine the shoes yesterday?"

Replied the latter, "Even if I did it would have been of no use. In such a weather, your shoes would become dirty again soon after you go out." He felt that the work was not worth doing as the shoes were bound to become dirty soon.

That very day, when it was time for supper, Mark Twain's lad entered the dining room. But nothing was left on the table for him. So he went to his master and asked why something was not kept for him.

Mark Twain replied, "Well, even if you have eaten, wouldn't you become



hungry later? I thought it would be no use for you to eat, because you would be hungry again."

On many occasions, we have this kind of excuse: "Oh! it will be of no use to do this, why take the trouble?" "Nothing will come of it, etc."

If we have this attitude, we will become reluctant to work hard. Certainly, without perseverance no progress can be made. Whatever the trials and tribulations, we must be indomitable and never give up our hopes. Strive, on we must.

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## CHAPTER IV

### Aim of Good Conduct

True, having a noble desire and a lofty aim promotes good conduct and high morality. "Noble aim is the basis for improving conduct," said a person. He continued, "Instead of asking the youth to have good conduct, they should be taught what kind of aim is noble and how to be resolute to reach that aim."

He also pointed out that when a person's motives are mean, he himself becomes mean. One who has an itch to steal and does so becomes a thief. One who dodges duty becomes a social parasite.

Once, in a village in Africa, a Headman thought of meeting his villagers. He

invited them to a party at his house. In throwing the party, he wanted to make manifest the idea 'where there is unity, there is happiness.' For that purpose, each of the visitors was required to bring along a pot of toddy. When arriving, they must pour their toddy into a big pot placed in front of the house. After the powwow, all would happily enjoy the toddy from the big pot.

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The arrangement having completed, the Headman sent his men to the village.

On the appointed day, the villagers came along with toddy pots. When they reached the Headman's house, they poured their toddy into the big pot according to the arrangement.

There was one villager who wanted to go to the party but toddy was not available to him. His wife told him to go and buy toddy somewhere. However, he was reluctant. He thought over and planned:

"Well, many villagers are going to pour their toddy into the big pot. Surely, the taste won't be lost just by pouring a pot of water into so much of toddy. Hm, I am going to fill my pot with water. When I reach there, I will just empty it into the big one and surely no one will be the wiser." With this idea in mind, he filled a pot with water and set out for the party. When he arrived at the Headman's house, he poured the contents of his pot jubilantly along with the others. How satisfied he must have been that no one knew what he had done.

After pouring his pot, he sat in the crowd and listened to the speech of the Headman. When the discussions ended, the Headman announced: "Dear folks, let us now enjoy toddy together,"

The cunning villager, though not having brought any toddy himself, was burning with desire to drink what others had brought. Then, the villagers went to the big pot to drink. They dipped their



cups into the pot and found out that it was—all water.

Only then did it dawn on the sly fellow: "Ah ha! They are no better—just like me."

So somewhat like that, if someone is selfish, if someone abuses public-property with the excuse 'just a little not worth mentioning,' if someone refrains from doing work and someone else follows suit, and if someone takes bribe and others do the same, then the number of social-misfits would increase and society would collapse with corruption.

I recall the words of Titus: "The Roman Empire fell not because of famine nor because of the attack from enemies outside but because of corruption."

Generally, everyone desires to become a man of good conduct and decides, 'I will be good.' But as the resolve to be good is not firm, character falls prey to temptations. The poor become corrupt.



*they are no better - just like me*

because of their poverty, whilst the rich become corrupt because of their greed.

Once there was a leopard that lived on a rock-bed beside the River Ganges. One day, unexpectedly, there was a deluge. The water rose high, encircling the rock-bed where the leopard stood.

Seeing this, the leopard thought: "Oh! Now there is no place to find food. I shall soon die of hunger. Even if I crossed the water to search food, death would be certain. Well, as there is no way out, it is better to die fasting." So he lay on the rock, and fasted.

While thus on fast, he was wakened by a sound nearby. He popped up his head to find a goat not far from him. The leopard changed his mind instantly— "Ah! I'd better fast tomorrow, but today I must kill him and dine on mutton."

He chased after the goat. But as the latter dodged well, he failed to catch and soon the goat was out of sight. The leopard returned to his place and mur-



mured: "Well, I have not broken my fast yet." So saying, he went back to sleep.

Without a fervent desire and a noble aim, it is hard for men to avoid evil and perform good deeds. When one tends to become corrupt, one cannot resist temptation. There is a Russian proverb: "When money speaks, the truth is silent."

By reason and intellect, we know which deed is good and which deed bad. We can easily tell one from the other. It is also easy to criticize others, what is right and what is wrong. But when tempted with an irresistible amount of money or some enticement, one accepts the offer without a demure. The reason being that one cannot keep steadfastly to the decision: 'Not to do wrong.'

So one becomes immoral, if the desire is not strong, the aim not noble and the mind not steadfast. If the determination to lead a noble life is weak, then one starts doing misdeeds little by



*to chip away unwanted parts*

little. Later, it would develop to such an extent that the habit cannot be stopped. For example, one takes liquor, thinking that drinking only once or twice won't do any harm. But when this grows to be a habit and gets beyond one's control, one becomes a dipsomaniac. The same thing happens when one thinks 'small things are of no consequence' and breaks the law, one will finally have no scruples left to commit crimes. True to the maxim: "Great evil has small beginnings." When a habit grows, it becomes difficult to stop. Let me tell you of what a great sculptor once said about it.

"When carving, we have to chip away unwanted parts so as to achieve a unique work of art. Man too, must chip away from his life unwanted parts such as bad habits and bad manners. Life becomes beautiful only when we are free of them".

Once, a master called for his pupil who has just got into bad habits. The two walked along a grove. On the way,



they saw a newly grown plant. Said the master: "Boy, go and pull out that little plant."

Taking the plant between his thumb and forefinger, the boy easily pulled it out.

They continued walking.

Soon they came across a sappling, firmly rooted to the ground. Again the master said, "Go and pull out that sappling." And the boy did as he was told. Using both hands and with some exertion, the boy pulled out the sappling.

The two continued their walk. The boy, wondered, "Why does the master make me pull trees without any use? Has he lost his senses?"

Before long, they came upon a big tree, one that could be clasped in both arms. And once again the master said, "Go and pull out that big tree."

It was impossible, but the boy obeyed his master's instruction. He clasped the tree in his arms and pulled with all his



*the tree remained rooted to the ground*

might. He was sweating profusely but the tree remained rooted to the ground.

Only then did the master explain: "I am not making you pull them without reason. I did so to show what I wanted to teach. Bad habits, bad manners like the small plant can be rooted out easily at an early stage. If you won't rid yourself of these bad habits but let them grow, then, like that big tree, they will take strong hold on you so that you can never do away with them. Then one's life is doomed. Bear that in mind."

True indeed, if a small banyan plant, growing from a seed on a huge building, is not weeded out early, then a time will come when its roots would stretch far and tear down the whole building. Bad habits too, with the passage of time, can destroy life. Considering this, we must avoid bad habits and once they take hold, we must weed them out quick.

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## CHAPTER V

### A Pleasant Environment

When you have a noble aim and a strong desire, you become virtuous and morally firm. If truly intent on leading a clean life with a lofty aim, then one can abide by the Five Precepts more firmly than ordinary people. The Five Precepts are to abstain from taking one's life, from stealing one's property, from sexual misconduct, from speaking falsely and from taking intoxicants. True, moral rectitude serves much to improve life. Buddhist teachings stress the following five rewards of virtues that a man can get:-

- (1) Prosperity through vigilance.
- (2) Enjoying good reputation.

- (3) Able to keep one's dignity in any company.
- (4) Dying without illusion.
- (5) Better life after death.

But one who lacks morality is deprived of success and prosperity. If a person is so seized by anger as to kill someone, then that person would solve problems ruthlessly without any consideration. Because of that, things that should not happen will happen to one's loss. Wrong livelihood too, makes a man destitute. Never could such a man enjoy good reputation. He would be condemned 'a wicked guy,' 'a cruel fellow.' Everybody would shun him. Such a brute has no place among the moral and gentle. Surely, he would feel out of place, if he happens to be with them. He dares not enter into good company. For one who steals or commits wrong sexual indulgence, he would surely wind up in troubles and dangers. Being immoral, he would stink with disgrace. He would also be unfit to mix in the company of good

people. How shameful he would be. A time will come when he would feel remorse and repent his misdeeds. And when he dies, he would die with a heavy heart. After death, he would not have a better life.

One who tells lies, speaks falsely, can never prosper. For a time he may profit something from lying but in the long run, friends and people who once helped him would avoid him for being dishonest. Someone, of his type, might turn up to cheat him as he has cheated others. Notorious for lying, he would be branded, 'a liar' — 'a cheat.'

Some people are said to be 'crafty'—'swift as a top.' However swiftly a top turns, it is bound to slow down eventually and stop. Or, it may bump against a swifter top and lose balance. Any person who lives on cheating and lying can topple any time. How can there be normal progress for such a person?

Taking liquor and intoxicants excessively makes a man lose his nerves

and conscience. How, in such condition, can he think straight? Without good ideas and plans, there can be no progress, no prosperity. Somewhere in the "Zatakas" \* much have been emphasized on how despicable one can be for being a slave to liquor. Here are some points:—

"In a state of drunkenness, a drunkard can fall at any step—from a cliff, or into a pit or a ditch. He is likely to fall on mud or dirt and become filthy. Being out of his senses, he may eat things unfit and eat them excessively."

"The drunkard loses control of his mind. Aimlessly, he heads for any place. With no clothes on him, he walks groggily about in the neighbourhood without any shame. He yells and sings at the top of his voice and, itching to dance, he does so. But as he cannot compose himself, his movements appear awkward like those of a wooden puppet."

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\* Birth stories of Lord Buddha.



“For a man drunk, any place is befitting to lie down. With a naked body, stinking of what he vomits, he falls asleep.”

“In a state of intoxication, he loses control of his tongue and dares to speak what he shouldn't. He speaks ill of others. Even in the presence of learned people, he tells ridiculous things with pomposity. Eyes glaring with liquor, he thinks conceitedly; ‘there is not one who can rival me,’ and driven by false pride he proclaims: ‘One is smart and clever only when he drinks.’ Saying and doing things that he shouldn't, he gets into a brawl. Finally he lands up in the dock.”

“Even if the drunkard comes of a wealthy family, his wealth is drained away with liquor. He becomes a pauper. By his own folly, he ends the line of wealthy descendents. Either by looting or stealing, he takes hold of his relative's property. For the love of liquor, he brings wreck and ruin upon all.”

“When one is drunk, false pride swells. Parents are abused. A drunkard father, driven by sex, would trespass on his daughter-in-law. A drunkard son too would offend his mother-in-law. And a wife, in the habit of drinking, would abuse her father-in-law or her husband. What is more, she might commit adultery with someone even beneath her status.

“And in a state of drunkenness, one forgets to attend to important matters that must be done in time. Such negligence might even cost one's life.”...

These are only some of the points from the text, and I've dealt with them because they are the main ones. So if you wish to know in detail—and you should know, please read the Teinta Nipat Komba Zat. \*

There are various mental diseases one can get by habitual drinking. By drinking excessively, one may suffer

\* A collection of Lord Buddha's 550 past-lives. Prose writing by U Kyee Pe Vol: 8, Pg. 177-191.

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from Delirium Tremor—a type of alcoholic madness or suffer from Alcoholic Hallucinatory Insanity a kind of mental hysteria. Anyone afflicted with these diseases thinks he hears someone urging him to do some misdeed. He even hears sounds, forcing him to inflict pain on himself and commit suicide. And because of these delusions, he can commit suicide. Sometimes, one goes to the extent of killing his dearest wife with a weapon, mistaking her for a demon.

Another disease from liquor is Alcoholic Pseudo-Paranoia. This, a type of mental disease, makes one suspicious of people around him and being ever jealous and dissatisfied with them. In extreme cases, he commits suicide. Or, he is always suspicious of his wife and accuses her of adultery. He even suspects his own children to be the offsprings of another. That suspicion may grow to the point where he turns wild and kills his children.

There is also another disease called Alcoholic Pseudo-Paresis. It is related to

nerves defect. Once this disease takes hold, legs and hands fail to function properly. When walking, the legs drag or limp along. You may have seen such a case. If this does not happen, the patient becomes over-conceited. He believes it is possible for him to do anything. He thinks himself as a hero and he acts recklessly.

So, one who has wrecked his life by drinking will never prosper and succeed. It is impossible for a dipsomaniac to have a good reputation. He would be condemned as a 'useless drunkard.' Being a slave to liquor, he is never at ease in the company of good, learned and respectable people.

Worse fate awaits those who have become addicted to extremely dangerous drugs like heroin. Their losses are greater. It may lead not only to loss of property or wealth but to the extinction of mankind. Nothing good can be said of a person like them.

He would be despised as an addict. To get the wherewithal to buy drugs,



he might probably steal whatever he could from his own parents or from his own house, not to speak of other people's property. He would be eyed with suspicion by others. Being reproachable, he too, cannot mingle in good society.

For one who is addicted to liquor or drugs, he cannot have a peaceful death. It is certain that there would not be a good ending in his final chapter of life.

Some take delight in gambling, say like cards. Such a person cannot enjoy a normal prosperous life. It is hard to find one that has made a fortune from playing cards. Judicious consideration will show that there is more chance of losing than of winning.

A gambler has no fine reputation. He is more likely to be looked down as a 'gambler', a 'card-crazy chap'. No gambler has esteem and respect for the other gambler. How could a person whose mind is bent on gambling find enjoyment

in the company of respectable persons, who value time? He is no match for those who are not like him in anyway. Being among them, he would develop an inferiority complex.

Precious time is wasted for anyone engaged in gambling. He turns his back on important matters and virtuous deeds. His health is affected by playing day and night without timely food and sleep. When gambling, he is motivated by greed, for which he has no peace of mind and his face is never serene. A man who spends his lifetime gambling will have no peaceful death. And his next life will be less promising.

So, if we have a fervent desire and determination to become noble, then our minds will become resolute. Moreover, we will have the support of diligence and guidance of wisdom. We will be free from misdeeds, free from all that block progress of life. And, with dignity, we can tread our path. What is more, we can help others with what we have achieved.

Thus, one who is of good conduct and avoids misdeeds need not fear retribution. If we have done nothing wrong, we need not kowtow to others or curry favour. Only one who has done something wrong has to exonerate himself from blame by ingratiating others.

As for one who has done nothing wrong, there is nothing to feel inferior or remorse for; to worry or be diffident about. He has only to march onwards with full confidence.

x x x



*nothing to worry or be diffident about*

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## CHAPTER VI

### For A Good Pearl

If the power of intellect and reason is low, if the mind becomes dejected and desires not sufficiently intense, then efforts will also decline.

Consistent effort implies diligence; doing something relentlessly until it is accomplished. Without exerting our efforts, we won't deserve anything worthy. It is like paying a handsome price for something of superior quality. The more successful we wish to be, the more intensive our efforts must be.

"To get good pearls, one must dive deep," so goes a saying. Similarly, if we want what is good, if we wish to enjoy

a better life, we must toil harder. Albert Camus, the writer, is generally inclined to give a sombre picture of life. But at one point, he struck a note of encouragement. Said he: "To be great, we have to attempt great, there is no other way." True, there is no shortcut to greatness. We must work unremittently.

Nothing can be accomplished just by sitting still and wishing, and without due effort.

Sages of yore have laid stress on this point:

"Everything is accomplished by efforts. None has been fulfilled by mere wishful thinking. For example, no prey would voluntarily enter into the mouth of a lazy lion that sleeps all the time."

Related to this, Lord Buddha's words should also be heeded.

"In life, there are five things human beings desire but rarely get."

1. "It is hard to have a long life with robust health. Man desires

- such longevity, a thing he rarely has. Man likes it, man adores it."
2. "It is hard to possess physical beauty too. Man desires such fine endowment, a thing he rarely has. Man likes it, man adores it."
  3. "It is hard to have a prosperous and wealthy life. Man desires such prosperity and wealth, a thing that he rarely has. Man likes it, man adores it."
  4. "It is hard to have the life of a man with a suite of attendants. Man desires such retinue, a thing that he rarely has. Man likes it, man adores it."
  5. "It is hard to have the life of a 'deva.\*' Man desires such heavenly opulence, a thing that he rarely has. Man likes it, man adores it."

"But it is impossible to attain these five desirable things that cannot be easily got in this world by merely uttering 'I

\* Celestial being.



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wish to have them.' Nor can they be fulfilled just by wishing, 'How wonderful if I had them.' Should these be attainable by mere words and thoughts, then nobody would be in want of anything; everybody would be fine and well off."

"Thus, he who wishes longevity must conform to the principles by which it can be attained. Similarly, those who wish to acquire personality, prosperity, etc—must find ways and make efforts."

According to Lord Buddha, desires and wishes cannot be attained just by mere thinking or praying. Nor by just uttering such words as, 'I want to'—or 'I wish to'. One needs to find possible means and strive hard to get results.

Certainly, all of us know that if we try hard enough, we will succeed. We all understand the essence of the words: "It is never too late to start doing what is good." But lacking diligence, we never come to a start, we become inert. We keep postponing again and again, and we fail

to proceed from where we must. As we don't move along, we don't reach ahead. By groaning and wavering, much time is lost. So, bearing in mind the maxim: "The longest journey begins with the first step," we must start to move. By taking a step forward, one is closer to the goal by one step. It is indeed much better than remaining idle.

Here, I recollect the words of St. Paul, who said: "I failed to do what I had intended to, but did what I had decided not to." Of course, he was disparaging himself.

What he said is true. We certainly know good and useful things that should be done. Surely, we have thought of doing them. But nothing is done for lack of efforts. Things that are not worth while, that are not noble, all these we think, speak and do. Concerning this, I recollect the words of a Burmese monk. He said: "To do good, people are not prompt. They have to consult astrology

for choosing the propitious day and time. But when they do something bad, such consultation is never necessary. They also never hesitate to speak ill or to think something bad, because they are in the habit of doing so.

Indeed, we do not persevere. What should not or must not be done, we do. What we should or must avoid, we don't. What we should or must perform, we fail to do. As such, our efforts are doomed to failure and frustration. Being lazy and slack, how can our intellect and reasoning be sharp? What is more, we err now and again.

To be sure, some do try. But when they are not successful, they fail to see the defect in their efforts but simply put the blame on fate: "Oh!, I tried hard and, inspite of my efforts, I have failed. Perhaps I am unlucky." Even if they did not cast it on fate, the blame would be put on other people or circumstances.

The reason why one fails inspite of trying is that perhaps more time is needed

for adequate efforts. How can we dig a well and get clean water instantly? So we must continue striving till we have made adequate efforts. When time is ripe, we will succeed. There is a saying: "We cannot eat fruit while the tree is in blossom." We have to wait until the tree bears fruit and wait a little longer until the fruit ripens. So, if we want to be successful, we have to make full efforts till we succeed.

Venerable Sayadaw U Wiceitta Thara Biwuntha, holder of Tipitakadra Title\* and a very eminent person of our times, recited by heart 7,900 pages of the Three Pitakas and many other Reverends' works. The Venerable has earned his place among the foremost scholars of our times. That is the result of his extraordinary diligence. It cannot be achieved by ordinary efforts. Leo

\* Title conferred on the Venerable who could recite out of memory, the entire Buddhist canonical texts on Discourses, Discipline & Ultimate Doctrine.



Tolstoy, the world-famous author, who wrote the great novel "War and Peace" (more than a thousand pages) took immense pains, rewriting some pages of that novel, as many as eighty times. The great inventor Edison, when making tests for his inventions, is said to have repeated them about thousands of times. For Venerable Mahathiva of Ceylon, it took thirty years without lying down and rest to become an Arahat.

That is why, if we fail inspite of trying, we should not dump it on fate but regard it as one needing requisite amount of zeal to succeed. We need to toil more.

Perhaps another cause of failure may be lack of adequate knowledge and prudence to cope with the matter. Without vigilance and wisdom, attempts would be futile. So without prudence necessary for judging things clearly, our efforts would be channeled to the wrong direction. Here, I remember an incident I have read.

Once, while the ship was lying at anchor, some sailors set out in a little boat to a small island nearby, to drink liquor. Reaching there, they tied the boat to a stump and went ashore. And there they drank to their hearts' content and made merry. After such fun and frolic, they were late returning to their ship. Half drunk and half asleep, they all went back to their boat and rowed back to their ship. The next day the sun rose and by then their drunkenness had worn off. They all blinked around and found—that they were still on the beach! What actually happened was that they came back to the beach deeply drunk, got into the the boat and just rowed without untying the rope from the stump. Row as they might, they would never have reached anywhere.

Well, that was because of intoxication, forgetting to untie the rope. Of course, in actual life this rarely happens. But the point I want to stress is that however you row in the stream of life,

if you do not have a clear view in judging and not doing what is fit, then you will get no where. It will not bear fruit. You cannot make out which is important and basic and which is not. That is what I want you to bear in mind.

Venerable Shin Maha Rahta Thara,\* used beautiful metaphors in describing how efforts would be futile without wisdom. He wrote: "Like a man who, wishing to make fire, puts dry leaves on fire-flies and blows hard to get flame; and like a man who, wishing to have milk, squeezes the cow's horns to make them squirt." These are examples, just to show how worthless efforts would be if one is not sensible. But in real life, no one would be stupid enough to use fire-flies for flame, nor would there be anyone foolish enough to milk the cow by squeezing the horns.

\* A luminary in Burmese Literature.  
AD 1468 - AD 1530; Burmese Encyclopaedia  
Vol. 8, Pg. 465.



*row as they might*



Though man is the most intelligent of beings, there is no other being that commits as many mistakes as man does in deeds, words and thoughts. What you commonly hear from men are such words of regret as: "I wish I hadn't done it." "It was wrong of me to have spoken like that," "I should have thought otherwise." So also, there is a wide range of differences and opinions among men. Even if a matter is simply false, yet you can find men superstitiously clinging to it. Among men, there are less fortunate people but more unfortunate ones. And the majority are those who have made mistakes. That being the case, we can rightly say that human beings are not so intelligent as generally supposed.

When one looks at one's life in retrospect, one finds more of nonsense and errors and less of what is good and true. Discerning these, one repents. So, whenever one looks back on these past mistakes and errors, one feels remorse and tries hard not to think of them.

Once, youths from various places came to a wise man to learn under his tutelage. One summer day, they set out for the wood to fetch kindle for their master. Among them, there was a very lazy boy. When they reached there, while others were busy searching, cutting and collecting wood, the lazy one did nothing.

He idled away his time. At some distance from him, he saw a 'yegadet'\* tree without leaves. And he thought, "If I climb up that yegadet tree and break the branches, I will get a bundle of wood in no time. So why should I trouble myself to go with them to fetch wood. No, I will take a nap and have some rest. Only on their return will I climb up that tree and break the branches". With this in mind, he went to the foot of the yegadet tree, spread on the ground the shawl he brought with him and lay down to rest. He fell asleep. The sound of his snoring was as hoarse as the voice of a raven.

\* *Crataeva hygrophila* - Kurz.  
Three-leaved Caper.

While he was asleep, the others were busy gathering fire wood and they had collected fine ones. In the evening, each came back with a bundle. On their way back, they found the lazy chap asleep under the yegadet tree. They kicked him and prodded: "Get up, you lazy lout!"

Only then did the lazy fellow drag himself up. As he had planned, he hastily climbed up the tree and broke the branches. But the tree was not as dry as he had thought and the branches could not be broken easily. However, as time was running out, he had to break them anyhow. In a state of frenzy, he had his eyes scratched with the tip of a branch and got hurt. The pain was severe. So he had to cover one eye with a hand and climbed down the tree with great difficulty. When he reached the ground, he tied the branches he had just broken and ran after his friends who had gone ahead. Being a coward, he dared not remain in the forest alone.



When he reached the master's house, his friends had already piled up their collection. So he put his wet wood on top of the pile.

On that very day, the learned man had received an invitation from a distant village. He intended to send his boys there. So he summoned them and said: "Tomorrow morning, you have to go to the village that sent this invitation. It is rather far. So wake up the maid early to make porridge for you. Only after taking it, you'd better go."

The next day, the boys got up early, awakened the maid, and asked her to make the porridge. She went to the woodshed for kindle. What she brought back was the wet wood which the lazy chap had placed on top of the pile the day before. How could she kindle fire with wet wood? Perhaps the maid herself was as lazy as that fellow. If the fire could not be kindled with wet wood, she should have gone to fetch

the dry ones. Being lazy and not sensible, she went on trying to kindle fire with the wet wood.

No fire could be lit, the porridge unboiled yet and by then it was broad daylight. So the boys could not have their porridge in time. As it was late, the boys failed to set out on their journey as planned.

The master came and asked: "Why haven't you gone to that village yet?" The boys recounted all that happened beginning from the wet wood the lazy chap brought.

And the master, taking the lazy boy as an example, exhorted: "Boys, do first things first. Else, you will have to suffer and repent like your friend who brought the wet yegadet wood."

For us, these words will serve us well throughout our life.

We cannot judge things correctly if we are inert and wavering. We will not know what we ought and what we ought not

to do. Lacking intelligence, we fail to do what we should, but do what we shouldn't. And all hasty efforts compelled by circumstances, would turn out to be futile. Say, like things that should have been done early but done late, or preparations that should have been made but neglected. Because of that, the result would be none other than loss, repentance and grief.

A student is expected to cover his course of lessons well before the exam. If he crams his lessons only when the exam draws nigh, he would be just like the boy who broke the yegadet branches, ending up with mishap. And, if driven by worry, he concentrates on his lessons without sleep and rest, he would surely get ill and fail to appear for the exam. Similar, a sportsman entering a contest must practise regularly. And to say something on religion, I would like to remind you that one must be diligent enough in one's meditation to attain at



*will have to suffer and repent*



least the First Enlightenment\* before becoming old and bed-ridden with disease. But if one strives out of fear or death only when one becomes old or when about to die that would be a vain attempt. How would it be possible to meditate when both physical strength and mental strength are worn out by age and disease? Without meditation there can be no enlightenment. That is why we must make efforts while we are physically and mentally good.

Lord Buddha, on one occasion, exhorted: "Just as a man would instantly remove the spear that is stuck in his chest to get rid of pain, and just as a man would immediately put out the fire that burns on his head, so also with equal urgency, one must exert efforts to liberate oneself during this life." Lord Buddha, stressed further: "Efforts

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\* The stage where one, having destroyed three Fetters i.e self-illusion, scepticism and indulgence in wrongful rites and rituals, enters the stream to Nibbana.

should this instant be made, ought to be made, must be made."

Because of poor efforts and a hesitant mind, opportunities are lost.

Once, there was a sculptor who displayed his works in an exhibition. Among his works, there was something extraordinary. It was a sculpture of an ancient Greek god and was carved in such a way that the hair covered the face. There were wings attached to the feet and on the pedestal was inscribed the word: 'OPPORTUNITY.' Of those who came to see, one person wondered what this sculpture meant. He was intrigued with it. He could not make out the significance of the legend 'OPPORTUNITY.' So he approached the sculptor and asked: "Why is its face hidden?"

The sculptor replied: "Opportunity comes to man, but he hardly sees it. For that reason, the hair is purposely made to cover the face."

"Why are there wings on his feet?" the person asked again.

"When opportunity arrives, it does not stay long. It soon flies. Therefore, the wings. Only those who seize it in time can benefit," replied the sculptor. Only then did that person understand the idea behind the sculpture.

True indeed. Because of sloth, things are set aside and put off. To dally is to miss opportunities. When it is too late, then only one repents, "Oh! I should have done it."

For those who do not seek learning at young age when they have the chance, for those who do not accumulate knowledge from learned ones when they are still alive and around, and also for those who fail to return their old parents the unrivalled love and care that the latter have all along showered upon them, all will have to repent in the end. By then, it will have been too late to make amends. And those who neglect to do good deeds, who fail to make use of opportunities being unaware of them will repent as time passes. So, if one does not strive for



success and well-being while one has both physical and mental strength, then misery will beset at old age. In Buddhist literature, an example of an old crane is given.

The crane was old and most of its feathers had fallen off. Unable to fly to the place where there was ample food, the poor crane had to remain near a lake waiting for a fish or two to catch. But the lake had dried up and there was no fish.

How doleful too is the one who has to toil hard for his living at old age, having unwisely used up his time, energy and opportunity.

However hard he may try now, it is impossible for him to succeed with such a frail body, dimmed eyes and a dejected mind. He has become crest-fallen. How unbearable would it be for one who has none to depend upon and left in isolation with a broken heart at the sunset of his life. So, while opportunity presents itself, we must do what must be done. Life's span is indeed short. Opportunities



*the idea behind the sculpture*

won't stay long as in the example of the sculptor but will soon pass. If we tarry and become lazy, opportunities would be lost. Knowing that, we must be alert and diligent.

Anyone who keeps on trying is bound to come up with some opportunity.

So, to seize the opportunities, one must have confidence. If diligent, one can achieve anything in life. Thus, we must relentlessly keep on trying. Yes, relentlessly.

x

x

x



## CHAPTER VII

### I, The Helmsman

To summarise all that I have said, there are four fundamentals a man must abide by to get what he wants and become successful. These are:

- (1) A clear and right outlook.
- (2) A resolute mind.
- (3) A lofty aim.
- (4) Diligence.

Of the four, if you achieve one, the rest will follow suit. I have already emphasised much on these four principles. I did so as an encouragement to fellow-travellers and as a reminder to those who may have overlooked them. When all is said and done, what matters most for

all of us is to firmly abide by the principles of success.

May I conclude with one more account.

Once in a village, there was a wise man. As he helped solve people's problems and plight, he was widely reputed for his wisdom. People, far and near, came to seek his advice. So he was never short of tributes. A gang of hooligans in the village became very jealous of him.

One day, the leader of the hooligans summoned his followers and said: "Let's disgrace that wise guy." They discussed their strategy and hatched a plan. Being hooligans, it was no surprise that the plan reflected their coarse nature. Their plan was as follows:-

The gang leader would clutch a live bird in his hand and stand in the path of the gentleman as he came along. When the latter neared him, he would show him the bird and ask, "Sir, is the bird in my hand dead or alive?"

Perhaps the wise man might say 'alive.' Should that be the answer, the bird would be squeezed to death instantly. The leader would then tell him; "Why, you are wrong. See here, it is dead." If, on the other hand, the gentleman's answer was 'dead', he would let the bird fly from his hand saying, "How can it be dead? It has flown away, as you see." So no matter what the gentleman answered, he would be in the wrong. They would all ridicule and disgrace him: "You call that a wise man? Why, he can't even tell a live bird from a dead one." Such was their scenario and they were very much delighted with it.

So one day, according to their plan, they waited for the wise man to come along. By and by, the gentleman came as they had expected. When he got near them, the leader said: "Just a moment, please, Sir." The gentleman stopped in his tracks, and the leader began:

"Sir, people far and near believe you to be wise. We want to know if it is true.



*dead or alive*



Please answer the question I am going to ask."

So saying, he held the bird close to the gentleman's face and continued:

"Well Sir, answer me. Is the bird in my hand dead or alive?" The hooligan and his cohorts expected the gentleman's answer to be either 'dead' or 'alive'. Whichever he answered, it would be wrong. They could hardly wait to mock and laugh at him for his mistake; "Oh! is this a wise man? Can't even answer a simple question correctly."

But the gentleman's answer was not what they had expected. Looking at the bird in the hooligan's hand, the wise man answered:

"It is — what you wish it to be."

Being a wise man's answer, it was full of wisdom and perspicacity. Nor was that all. His answer was not without pity for the little bird as well as for the rowdies. And the little bird's life or death, he discerned, was in the hand of the hooligan. He knew if he

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had answered that the bird was alive, it would have been killed and had he answered that the bird was dead, it would have been freed. Life or death of the little bird rested on the hooligan's wish. That was why instead of saying, "It is alive" or "It is dead", he had said, "It is— what you wish it to be."

So, the hooligans could not find fault with the gentleman's answer. The wise man left them looking at his back with their mouths agape, totally befuddled and nonplussed.

Well, it is like what the wise man said in the story. Our lives are mainly in our own hands. With a right view, resolute mind, lofty aim and diligence, we must steer our own lives, to become good, to overcome obstacles and to improve. Why should we attribute life's vagaries to our past lives that cannot be seen? Why should we place all our trust on others and depend upon them? Why should we let our lives follow the dictates of someone, believing that our lives are governed



*I, the helmsman*



by the will of the Creator? Surely, one must be the helmsman of one's own life and steer forth.

Well, I have now come to an end.

It is my fervent hope and desire that all of you are free from dangers and difficulties. But if you happen to be amidst them or are about to be so, then I do hope that, by endeavouring in accordance with the principles of success, you will win over all odds — great or small.

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*Twists and turns, dark or blurred,  
Winds, waters and storms — accursed.*

*Ferocious life, fraught with perils,  
But cowed and crushed—conquer'ble.*

*Proud with success, you tread along,  
The flowery path where fountains surround.*

*Yes, in happiness...yes, at ease...  
May there be in your life... 'PEACE.'*



CORRIGENDA

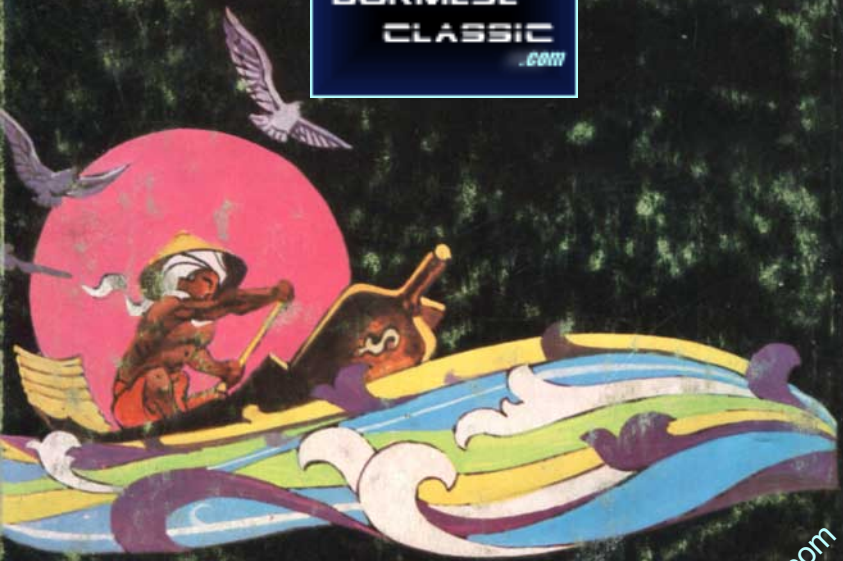
Page	Line	For	Read
10	8	intellegent	intelligent
19	11	Man,	Man
23	23	ability been proven	ability having been proven
29	15	doutful	doubtful
54	15	vigilence	vigilance
55	18	place,	place
58	21	descendents	descendants
60	3	Insanity	Insanity,
65	8	unremittently	unremittingly
77	2	fire wood	firewood
80	9	repentence	repentance





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