

Change

The focus of this article will be about change, in particular—how and why must one go about achieving a positive change—as individuals and as a society?

When one talks about change, it suggests a process of learning and implementing changes with an open mind. To do this, one must first submit to the fact that something needs to change, that the status quo is not adequate or acceptable. The articles on 'Passivity', 'The problem' and 'Action' (Articles 1, 2 and 3), stated that there was a problem in individuals and showed how this problem is reflected in society. A status quo that the authors state as being unacceptable.

Once the problem was identified, the magnitude of the problem seemed daunting. How would one act on this? How would one bring about a change in ones own self, and in ones country?

I thought to myself, "Here we have a problem that resides in me, and to some extent or the other, resides in more than a billion of my countrymen. This means that I have a lot of work to do. I have to increase awareness in myself and in my fellow countrymen." But I asked myself, "Unless I become a model citizen myself, how would I be able to honestly and with a clear conscience, expect others to appreciate and act on my message?"

While the process of introspection and change has always been a part of my personal life, I was lost as to how I could focus my energy on a larger problem as well—a problem that affected my country, my world.

To me, the answer was in simple changes, simple actions. Changes that were not just directed at myself alone, but instead, changes that were also made with one eye on the larger picture.

One such change was to be more effective and efficient with my life. "With such a large problem ahead of me, how could I relax and be complacent with my life?"

I set myself goals, personal goals, and goals for society around me. I identified honesty as a major factor. I said to myself, "If I really want to solve fundamental problems that exist in society, shouldn't I be able to thoroughly understand the more visible problems as well?", "Since

passivity is the problem, how can I expect others to be active, when I don't follow the same principle myself?"

I joined a social group that helps India's development. It is a social group run by Indians both in India, and in the US. When I first heard about it, I was impressed that the members of the organization genuinely get involved in the projects that they fund in India. Although the projects were thousands of miles away, the US based volunteers made it a point to visit the projects when they visited India. It seemed like a sincere and effective organization. I had meant to join this organization for a long while, but I had not got down to doing it.

At the first meeting that I had attended, the group was talking about a project that the organization was supporting back in India. The project was a zero waste management project and a significant part of this project was collecting organic waste and turning this waste into compost that would eventually enrich the soil.

At this meeting, a student interrupted proceedings by saying that it would be honest on our part to learn from this program and implement it our own lives. As individuals first, and then as a community. While recycling of plastics, glass and even paper is common in our community, recycling organic waste is not. If we were to fund such a project in India, should we not implement a similar system ourselves? It was then that the reality of change—and the significance of honesty—struck me. It was very easy for a group of us to sit around and talk about funding a project in India, it was easy for us to go on a fundraising drive in order to fund this project. But it was so much harder for us to actually get down to implementing a small aspect of the program in our own lives. We eventually set up a core group of members who are working towards finding a solution for the members of our organization to compost the organic waste that we produce.

Immediately, the world opened up to me—our university has no such system. If I am a model citizen in this regard today, tomorrow, I could walk up to my university, and honestly demand that they take up a similar project on a university level. Then, the university will serve as a model for the community.

Another simple change that I implemented in my life is to react when I see something that I know in my heart is wrong. The other day I received an email that I thought was making excuses for some of the most visible problems in India. In the email, the author spoke of how laws were necessary in order to have control over the masses. Instead

of ignoring the author, or simply disagreeing with the author but not even reacting on it.

I actually replied by saying that this is an issue that needs to be given more thought. It may seem like a small act—just a little email. But what transpired was a constructive discussion. The author agreed that change was necessary on both the individual and the government level.

Again, the world opened up to me. The reaction could be followed with a slightly more significant action.

The next step was to get the local student boards involved and identify the same problem to them. Then there will be a discussion on a larger scale.

Another issue that comes to mind is Global Warming. Everyone realizes it's a major problem. But if we look at our own lives, how many of us are willing to actively put in an effort to make the necessary changes in order to live cleaner and more sustainable lives? If you think about similar issues in society, you will find that we are very quick to empathize with issues; we are quick to identify their significance. We are even ready to mull over their implications. But acting on them is the last thing that we do.

The point of this article is to recognize that larger issues must be addressed by looking inwards first, being honest, and then working towards a larger cause in whatever way possible. Change must begin with recognition of the problem or acceptance of the problem i.e., thought and honesty. This is followed by small simple changes, i.e., small actions. But this must always be done with a larger goal in mind. That is, simple changes must be followed up with more significant changes in the near future-action.

This article hints at how individual changes can lead to greater change. A future article, titled 'One' will talk about how cautious, realistic optimism is needed to bring about this change in ones own self and ones own world.

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