

One

Very often, when we are faced with a problem of very large magnitude, we tend to react by saying, "Oh, this is too big a problem, I can't see myself solving it, so I why bother to even try" or, our reaction may be, "Oh, it's such a huge problem, it's idealistic to think you can ever solve it. There are going to be X, Y and Z obstacles along the way, how are you going to solve them?"

But have we ever considered the other point of view?

The other view point has a few possible reactions. For example, one reaction might be "If we are not going to *start* addressing the problem, then it will never be resolved! Doesn't someone have to start somewhere?" or, "Don't we see events occurring everyday that may have seemed idealistic when they were first thought about sometime in the distant past?"

A simple analogy is one of a student taking her standard 12 (12th Standard) final exam. Imagine that you take a 12th standard final examination paper and place it in front of a 5 year old. Isn't it hard to imagine that one day in the future, this same child will be able to sit for three long hours, understand all the questions in that paper, and of course, answer most, if not all questions in that paper?

Even though this task seems impossible for a young child, we do not tell the child that the task is impossible. Instead, we teach the child slowly, a process that lasts for years. The child tackles one problem at a time, until the goal is achieved and the student has graduated.

We follow similar strategies in other aspects of our lives. We do not try to solve all the issues in our life in a single day. We break down problems into smaller ones and start by solving the smaller problems, until eventually the bigger problems are solved.

The same strategy is used in approaching obstacles. Obstacles will always be present along the way, but you try to work around them in some manner.

Even when a student is writing an exam, they are always advised to skip a question if it is taking too much time to understand or solve. The idea is that the student takes care of what she can, while she has the time, and tackle the relatively tougher problems later.

We must use a similar attitude and strategy when we look at the larger problems facing our country. Rather than looking at these issues as problems of immense magnitude that cannot be solved. We must look at them as a challenge that must be tackled one step at a

time. The key points to remember are 1) We must make the start, because otherwise, it will be impossible to achieve any result, and 2) We can tackle the smaller challenges first, before tackling the larger challenges or obstacles in the future.

Often, I talk to my friends about the fundamental problems facing our country today- either misplaced negativity, misplaced optimism, our inherent passivity to the problems that face us, or our lack of empathy for the less fortunate. While they seem to think there is no solution to this problem, I tell them that there is a solution and that it must start with a change in attitude and that this change needs to start with us. When I tell them this, a reply I hear often is, "I totally agree with you, but there are many people who will just not care and they will never agree with you." or , "I totally see your point, I agree with you. But there are one billion people out there! How are you going to get your point across to them? Isn't it easier for the government to tackle the problem and change the laws, than for the powerless individual trying to spread awareness?"

When I hear this, my answer is usually the same. Firstly, you have to start somewhere. If you don't start, then the process will not begin. Yesterday, I saw the problem. Today I spoke to you and you see it. Today we both begin to change our own attitude. Isn't that a major contribution to society in itself? Then one by one, we begin to spread this thought.

Another point that I make in this reply, is the power of the individual. I stressed on this in an earlier article as well. The power to write to the newspapers, the politicians, the government officials, or to your own friends. From thought, follows action. If your writing reflects your thought and your writing sent out to the world, then your thoughts and words are steadily assimilated by the audience. Eventually, the change will be more visible.

I would like to emphasize this point with one final true life example. A professor in my department was appointed as Chair of the doctoral department. What transpired in the couple of years since the professor's promotion to chair of the department was a series of changes that directly benefited the entire student community and the department as a whole. Earlier, when the professor was first appointed as chair, he was asked, "Why did you feel there was a need for reform, and now that you are the chair of the program, what changes are you planning on implementing?"

At the time, the professor's reply began with the words, "I felt the need for reform ever since I joined the department, 11 years ago..." It is important to note the thoughts of the professor when he first joined the department. These same thoughts, lead to words which he spoke for years and they eventually led to a significant change in the

existing system. The professor never gave up, even if it took more than 11 years for that change to take place. The thoughts that he had when he first joined as a junior faculty were quite simply along the lines of "Wait a minute, things aren't right here. I see a way we can make things better."

The articles on 'passivity', 'the problem' and 'action', look at our country and say "Wait a minute, there's something that's not quite right. It seems to us that in the last 60 years, we could have done a lot better than we have and we see a way we can make things much better from now on."

But this attitude and change has to start somewhere.

This article aims to emphasize the power, significance and necessity to begin this process of thought. Even if in the beginning, the process involves just one individual. You.

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