

In Response to Living Values

by Carol Gill

Every day we see the truth proven false and the false true. We not only experience the wrong to be right, but we are able to prove it right. Attention to values keeps us from being deceived and from deceiving ourselves.



- The world has become topsy-turvy.
- Human atrocity has become commonplace.
- Hunger, poverty, selfishness, and greed abound.
- One after another our traditional role models of behaviour fall ignominiously from grace.

Human behaviour continues to become more and more vicious, not only demonstrated by the grossest violations of human rights as well as of the laws of nature, but also apparent at the most subtle

levels. It was a sad commentary on the human condition in general and business in particular when one professional remarked to another, "They will `stab you

in the back' either to protect their jobs, to get ahead, or because they like it."

It seems as if every day we see the truth proven false and the false true. We not only experience the wrong to be right, but in our arrogance we ourselves are able to prove it right. It seems we've forgotten the important things we once knew and have become trapped in the muck and mire of this material world. I dare say that if Truth were inviting us to lunch, we'd probably make the appointment but cancel later due to conflicting priorities.

Clarity of Values

Enter the word values and all it implies and evokes. Sadly, it has become an emotionally-laden buzzword of our time. Here in America, for instance, family values have become tied to the 'politically correct'. The concept turns many people off because so many good citizens have lost trust. And although politicians may mean what they say when they say it, external circumstances have a way of building illusions around even those with the most positive intentions, let alone those less trustworthy. And so, in this day and age, values are as hotly debated as religion and politics.

To clarify, some values are instilled in or adopted by us, we've been conditioned by cultural norms, social mores, everyday experience, and the like. Those values may be wrong or right. They are subjective, depending on the beliefs of the collective or the individual. Other values are absolute - embedded so deeply and linked so directly with universal truths that they transcend all belief systems and are understood at the core of every human being.

That there are core values such as respect and responsibility, honesty and happiness, is not the issue. Such true values are etched too indelibly in a place of pure worth within each of us. How to live or embody those pure values, however, is open for debate. (Although, on second thought, in this day and age, there will always be some of us who, in not recognising the interconnectedness of all values, would argue a case for which true value has more worth. Or whether honesty is a value or a virtue or a principle. Semantics usually enters the picture, but that's an expansion I wish not to pursue.)



The point is that everyone lives by values, whether they think about them or not and generally everyone has something to say about them. It is no wonder so many feel bitter, cynical, even jaded about values. That is because not only do we experience rampant negativity and degradation as described above, but also we have lost sight of higher-order, spiritual values as we focus on the attractiveness of material values such as social position, monetary worth, external appearance, personal possessions, etc. Such worldly values may appear more clear and beautiful than true values, just as white silver, which constantly sparkles, would appear more beautiful than real silver, which becomes black. How many of us would turn away expensive diamond earrings or

cufflinks, opting instead to wear the simple jewel of humility.

Value-able or Not?

In my own experience, when talking to good, wholesome, sincere people about core values, I often get the feeling that they believe in the worth of true values and perhaps think it is nice that I have devoted time and energy to values. Yet, I sense a discrepancy between what they may believe deep down and how that manifests in their thoughts, words, and actions. Sometimes I feel as if they want to pat me on the head and say, "That's nice what you're doing about values. Now run along." There's disinterest. It's as if such values have no bearing on their lives.



Some people profess to having values, but are they clear about what these values mean? So many of us are experiencing a painful and widening gap between our ideal values and the values we live by. We are forced every day to make choices that compromise or undermine our values and belief systems. Human beings are deceiving themselves if they believe they can live by different rules and values in their private lives versus their public or professional lives. That creates stress, tension, peacelessness, disharmony or conflict within, which, of course has an impact on interactions and relations. Yet, it is not so easy to answer the question: Am I really willing to make choices in which I

lose approval, attention, recognition, safety, worth and status in the external world if I were to follow my conscience in the inner world?

Another challenging question: Is it possible to live a life embodying utmost integrity, in which our thoughts, words and actions are in alignment with fundamental values, which, in turn, are linked directly to universal principles governing human nature and conduct? Answering that would require deep, inner exploration, including identifying values which are the motivation for our behaviour, as well as examining and being honest about our intentions.

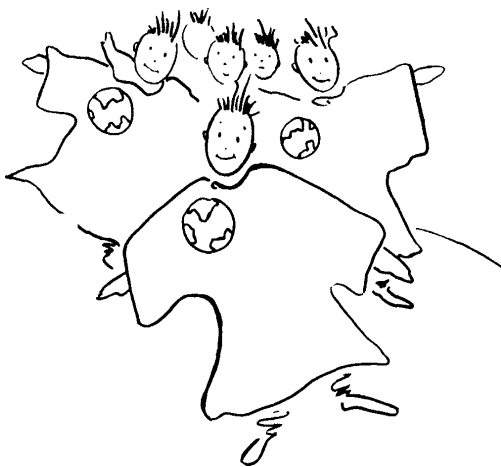
The benefit of that inner search: We, as individuals, can begin to recognise who we really are and to discover a capacity to create something for ourselves beyond the limits of our current reality. The concern: So few people see value in doing that. The irony: The process brings such benefit.

Attention to intentions, reflection on breaking old moulds or patterns, and creating new habits and behaviours which 'feel right' have an effect. That active process is the impetus for positive change. Positivity reflects back on an individual as surely as night turns to day. It's a law that what one sows' one reaps and it applies not only to our actions but also to our words and thoughts.



Making Change Possible

What if I were to say that the status quo is no longer acceptable, and that you had to change? How would you go about doing that? Stephen Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, suggests we begin with the end in mind. In other words, if you knew you were going to die tomorrow, what would matter most? How would your life have made a difference? Beginning with the end in mind is large-picture thinking. When daily activities are enacted and decisions made within that context, our choices not only reflect right values but are also directed from deep within, with conscience serving continually. In experiencing 'the end,' would you regret all those 'should haves'? Would you wish you had 'cleaned up your act'? The writer Joseph Campbell said regrets are illuminations come too late.



So, how does one create change in one's life? How does one recognise his or her full potential in relation to the self and to the wider world?

A needs self-assessment helps.

1) Ask yourself, what is my **actual state** in the following areas:

Personal (including personal growth/education, spirituality, fitness, creative self-expression);

Relationships (reflect on the self, God, family, friends, colleagues, etc.);

Lifestyle (examine balance, use of time, how lifestyle reflects values);

Service (think about how you contribute to others, e.g. family, community, world).

Ask, what is my degree of happiness? What values do I profess? How are they manifested in my thoughts, words, or actions? How are my values compromised and why? Record enough about your current situation so you feel satisfied that you've created an accurate picture of yourself.

2) Ask yourself, what is my **ideal state**? Use your imagination to create your most perfect you, the best you can be. What would you be thinking, saying, doing? How would you feel about yourself? How would others feel about you? What values would you embody? Don't allow any part of yourself to kill that self-actualised you by emerging thoughts about why it cannot happen. And especially don't use 'not enough time' as an excuse. The ideal you has perfect control over your time and your life.

The discrepancy between your current and ideal states is identified as the need.

What do you need to do to close that gap? For best results, think in behavioural terms. For instance, you may want to wake up 15 minutes earlier to create quiet time for yourself; you may want to walk away from gossip sessions or change the subject; or you may want to do some volunteer work in your community one day a month. By creating change via specific behaviours, you can measure the degrees of your progress. By creating goals that are challenging, yet attainable, you can stretch but you won't set yourself up for failure.

Taking Responsibility

People generally resist change because getting from here to there seems difficult, even impossible. Yet, the impossible becomes possible through small, incremental steps. Within the individual, transformation takes place one step at a time. Within the collective, it takes place one individual at a time. Some people may feel dissatisfied with the notion that the world will become a better place when each individual person becomes a better person, or that peace in the world can happen when there is peace within the individual. Some may think it preposterous that world transformation can happen through individual transformation. Such notions do not negate the roles of governments, the United Nations, or other instrumental organisations. Instead, such realisations should serve as wake-up calls to individuals who may delude themselves into thinking they cannot influence the state of this world.



What if each individual capable of doing it were to take responsibility for and be accountable to only his or her own sphere of influence, that which he or she comes in contact with every day. And what if each individual, for

instance, were determined to use neither derogatory words about anyone else nor do anything to violate the rights of anyone else? Wishful thinking, you say? Well then, what if everyone reading this article became committed to some form of positive change, for example, 'living' the value of responsibility or by consciously and conscientiously being a role model of behaviour? How many would make an impact? The grass roots are absolutely capable of creating and sustaining an upward spiral of positive change. We would be deceiving ourselves thinking otherwise.



*Carol Gill is a training and development consultant in Manhattan, USA. She feels her most valued accomplishment to date is serving as copy editor of *Living Values: A Guidebook*, a Brahma Kumaris publication dedicated to the United Nations on its 50th Anniversary.*

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