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Towards Spiritual Awakening

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The recent brutal violation of the young girl we call Nirbhaya – the Fearless one – has shaken everyone, compelling us to examine the life we lead and the values we follow. Any kind of violence perpetrated on another is not a sign of power; it is a pointer to weakness and lack of character that comes from lack of direction which in turn could be the result of various reasons. In this case, there was absolutely no respect for another's dignity or life.

One day in 1893 Swami Vivekananda was walking down a street in Chicago clad in two pieces of untailed saffron cloth. At that time this was a strange sight in America. A lady who was walking on the same street saw Swamiji, and said to her husband: "I don't think this man is a gentleman." Swami Vivekananda, who overheard her remark, walked up to her and politely said: "Excuse me Madam, in your country the tailor makes man a gentleman; but in my country, character makes man a gentleman." Gentleman is as gentleman does – it is not about what he is wearing. We need to do more than revive this spirit in India. We need to conduct ourselves in a way that we uphold human dignity and sanctity of life and realise our potential as a spiritual superpower.

Every group of people outraged by the criminal assault on Nirbhaya is voicing their concern for a common cause: to make India crime-free, a value-based society, law-abiding, where human dignity is preserved, and where we may present a good example to other nations.

After Independence, our leaders wanted to bring about reform in India. The easy way they found was paper activism, that is, legislation. You can write laws on paper, but paper cannot implement laws by itself. Both the

Parliament and state assemblies were actively involved in enacting laws, to the extent that now we are living in a jungle of laws.

Importantly, in India there are numerous human *rights* activists, but seldom can you find a person or organisation which engages in human *duties* activism. This has created a society that is *rights*-conscious rather than *duty*-conscious. A rights-conscious person only knows his own needs, whereas a duty-conscious person thinks about the needs of society. That is why crimes flourish in a rights-conscious society, while in a duty-conscious society, crimes are kept in check.

As a Gandhian, I can say that peace is not simply a method, peace is power. We need to start a peaceful movement aimed at reviving positive human values. In Gandhian terms, it is non-violent activism that made India a free India. I hope that the present non-violent activism will lead to the next cherished goal, that is, making India a spiritual India.

If we want respect for ourselves we have to respect others. Overcome your base instincts and realise your potential as a human being to lead a life of non-violence by following divine character. Conscience is the strongest check against wrongdoing. Anyone who wants to live as an honest person must keep guard and heed his conscience or moral sensitivity. Keeping one's conscience alive is the only way to maintain a peaceful character and doing so is the beginning of spiritual awakening.

Violence results from a feeling of deprivation and negativism, while peace results from positivism and a sense of discovery. Violence must, in principle, be discarded absolutely and peace must be adopted absolutely. This is the only way towards a spiritual awakening.

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