

CHAPTER 41

The Most Noble Life

Every nation has heroes. If we pay close attention to those who are remembered and known as most noble, we can recognize that most of them had one thing in common: They were people of goodness and lived lives of goodness.

What is a truly good person? If we do not know the standard by which a good person is measured, then we will not be able to clearly distinguish between good and evil.

What is goodness? What is evil? Why does every nation keep in its memory its national heroes? Why are the founders of religions still respected by so many, and why is it, even though history undergoes major changes and revolutions take place, that their teachings don't change? This is an important question. It is because the values that these heroes taught are universal and eternal — beyond historical periods, national boundaries, race, or custom. "Loving one's enemy" can transform a person's life in just as powerful a way whether this teaching is practiced in a modern city or in a rural village in Palestine two thousand years ago.

What kind of character do noble people maintain? Their character is seen through a consistent and reliable relationship between the mind and body in which the mind is stronger and controls the body. Ordinary people often experience inner confusion and conflict when facing temptations in life. For instance, if we have an opportunity to cheat during an important exam, or if by a small betrayal we can gain the friendship of a person we value — how shall we act? Is it 100 percent predictable that we will act in accordance with our highest conscience or the highest standard of values we know? When an ordinary person feels temptation, he often gives in to it, but a person of goodness is different. Although he may be pulled around somewhat, his feet are firmly anchored.

All people of goodness had to discover certain guiding principles. During their own period of uncertainty, they learned to deal with temptation and thought out their standards, until finally they had a rock-like foundation within themselves.

Acts of love and sacrifice characterize the way of goodness. To be a good friend, we must be willing to sacrifice for the sake of our friends. We can't always do only what we want to do. If we want to have friends, we have to give up our own interests sometimes and choose to do those things that our friends like to do. Often we have to put aside our own needs and desires in order to take care of a friend who is in need of our help or support. If you are a person who supports and cares for your friends, even when it is difficult, your friends will never leave you and they will come to like you more and more. A loving person is continuously growing.

When husband and wife live for each other's sake, a good marriage will be the result. Many times individuals must adjust their point of view or shift their priorities in order to maintain a harmonious relationship. Good parents sacrifice for the sake

of their children. How many times did your mother sacrifice her sleep to change your diapers and feed you when you were a baby? What if she had decided to stop after she had changed 500 diapers and fed you 1,000 times because she was tired of sacrificing for you? Do you think it was a good thing that she continued to take care of you, even though it must have been very difficult at times?

Using people for your own sake, in contrast, assures a quick pathway to self-destruction. If you decide to live for the sake of only yourself, then you will never experience love. Love starts only when we share what we have with others. This is captured by the classic Charles Dickens tale *A Christmas Carol* in which Ebenezer Scrooge, unhappy despite all his riches, learns to experience joy when he discovers how to give to others. When Scrooge shares his wealth with members of his family and community, he becomes a source of love and happiness.



From this perspective, what will happen to a person who invests something for the sake of others? The result is that his investment will multiply, even though it seems that he risks losing everything. Within a family, if a person serves his parents well and puts his brother and sister before himself, as time goes by he will certainly become the center of that family. According to the principle of love, the more we live for others, the higher the level of love that will be realized.

Jesus himself practiced this principle of love. The result of his love and sacrifice became the realization of a higher ethical life for Christians around the world. Another example of this principle of love is the beloved Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity minister to persons who have been left to die in the streets of India, taking them in and treating them with care and dignity. She has inspired others by her life of service. She herself is physically small and fragile, but as a woman living for the sake of others, she has become the strongest of all. She once said:

What these people need even more than food and shelter is to be wanted. They understand that even if they only have a few hours left to live, they are loved. Make us worthy, Lord, to serve those throughout the world who live and die poor and hungry.

To the degree that a person seeks his own interest, he is inclined to evil; and to the degree that he thinks about others, he is that much a better person. In the final analysis, who is a noble person? He is the one who is not corrupted by selfish desire and who does not try to take advantage of others in order to push himself ahead. He is the person whom you or anyone could absolutely trust. He would never betray you under any circumstances. Noble people are those who live with a noble purpose. They live for something greater than themselves. They devote themselves to that purpose and do not change.

All of us know people who have dedicated their lives to unselfish service of others — in the realms of science, art, religion, and in the service of their country, especially in times of trial. They help others by their example of wholesomeness and determination. Their lives are based on pure conscience, and the values of truth, beauty, goodness, and love. Such individuals are universally regarded as people of value.

The virtues and guiding principles lived by these noble men and women enlighten the heart and conscience of all people regardless of nationality, race, custom, geographical location or historical era. They have taught us that the most serious and important challenge a human being can take upon himself is to become a person of true love. And the broader this love, the more noble memories will a person leave for generations to come. One may love only himself, or only his family or his people or nation. But the greatest standard of love can only be achieved if we are able to overcome our prejudices and limitations so as to share our love with anybody we meet. If we can do this, we too can become extraordinary men and women.

Let us look at some examples of noble people and those who lived a saintly life.

In the history of any country you can find famous people who are remembered for many centuries after their death. They are great saints and religious figures, scientists and statesmen, writers and artists, generals and political leaders, and many others. Some of them are known to everyone, and others are lesser known. However, all of their names and deeds are carefully preserved in their nation's memory. Their lives have been examples of devotion and self-sacrifice for the sake of the nation, and in some cases, for the sake of the world. They demonstrate how a person can overcome any obstacle, grief or temptation. They show the power of the human spirit and of love. Their lives and deeds can be regarded as setting the highest moral and spiritual standard, and undoubtedly, they comprise the spiritual wealth of a nation.

The following two sections are taken from the book by M. Soloviev, "General Readings of Russian History."

The trader and the prince

The year 1611 took place during what is called the Time of Troubles, an era of confusion and chaos for Russia. During this period there was a vicious fight to control the throne, which resulted in a decade of ever-changing tsars. The last of the tsars to rule at this time was Basil Shuiski, but he was quickly dethroned and took shelter in the serenity of being a monk. Polish troops were attacking Russia and had already captured Moscow. The patriarch had been taken into custody. Throughout the turmoil handfuls of citizens traded their loyalty to Russia in return for security, and in a short episode the city of Novgorod was seized.

But it was then that people appeared who proved capable of opposing the enemy, not for the sake of glory or profit but only because of the call of their heart and out of love of their country.

In the cells of the Monastery of the Trinity and St. Sergius, scribes composed admonishing charters and sent them to many Russian towns and regiments. The summons to purification reached Nizhny Novgorod and was read in front of all the citizens. And then the mayor of the town, the butcher and cattle-dealer Kuzma Minin, addressed the people: "If we are to help the state of Moscow, then why spare our goods? Nothing shall we spare. We shall sell all we possess and go to seek a man to stand up for the Russian land and become our leader." Next they called for soldiers and raised money for their equipment. But even before this they had to find a commander who could lead the troops to Moscow. At that time a famous commander, Prince Dmitry Mikhailovich Pozharsky, lived not far from there, recovering from wounds he had received in defending Moscow against the Poles. Pozharsky answered the summons of the Nizhny Novgorod citizens, saying, "I am glad to hear your appeal, ready to go right away, but first choose someone from your

own people to help me in such a great deed and raise money with me.” The citizens of Nizhny Novgorod chose Minin.

Pozharsky took the leadership of the army, which was made up of soldiers, noblemen, and landlords. Those landlords who joined the army were unable to support themselves from their ruined estates, so the citizens allotted funds for their maintenance. Minin was in charge of the country’s liberation.

As soon as the news was spread that the people of Nizhny Novgorod had revolted and were ready to make any sacrifice, soldiers came from every direction to join them.

A year later Minin and Pozharsky’s national home guard liberated Moscow from the Polish troops. The departure of the Poles made it possible to elect a new tsar, Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov. That was the end of the Times of Trouble, so hard for Russia, which had lasted 20 years and brought so much grief and suffering.

In Moscow there is a famous monument to Minin and Pozharsky in Red Square. There is an inscription on the pedestal: “To citizen Minin and Prince Pozharsky from grateful Russia.” Pay attention to the sequence — a simple citizen comes first, and only then stands the name of the nobleman, a prince! Russia appreciated the heroic deed of Kuzma Minin. That man was not a statesman or a military strategist. He was a cattle dealer, but he loved his country passionately and possessed an extraordinary spiritual force. He was able to shoulder a responsibility that no one else could accept at that time! When Russia’s forces were ruined by wars and calamities, Minin managed to revive the nation by the force of his spirit and by his personal example, to raise money and to create the national home guard that finally liberated Russia.

The spiritual force and the feeling of personal responsibility for the fate of their country manifested by Minin and Pozharsky became an unforgettable example for all Russian citizens. Two centuries later, in 1812, Napoleon’s army began to advance on Russia. Tsar Alexander issued a manifesto in which he addressed the people with the following words: “Let the enemy meet Pozharsky in every nobleman ... and Minin in every citizen. Unite, all of you; With the cross in your hearts and with weapons in your hands, you can be overcome by no human forces.”



The Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fyodorovna

The Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fyodorovna was the sister of the last Russian empress, Alexandra Fyodorovna. A woman of deep faith and extraordinary integrity, she devoted her life to founding charities and financing a number of institutions and committees.

During the Russian-Japanese War (1904-1905) the duchess contributed several fully equipped medical trains. Every day she visited hospitals where she supported the widows and orphans of deceased Russian soldiers with both money and care.

The life of Elizaveta Fyodorovna was full of severe trials. In 1911 the anarchist I.P. Kalyayev assassinated Elizaveta's husband — the general-governor of Moscow, Grand Duke Sergey Alexandrovich Romanov.

Although she grieved greatly over the loss of her husband, Elizaveta Fyodorovna followed the Christian example and begged the tsar to have mercy upon the assassin.

After that event, the grand duchess invested her money in the founding of the Cloister of Martha and Mary, a monastery in Moscow. She herself lived within the walls of the cloister.

Soon she also founded a charity hospital (employing the best doctors of the city), a chemist's shop, an orphanage for girls, and a library around the cloister. Elizaveta Fyodorovna devoted all her life to serving people. She lived the life of a nun and worked at the hospital as a nurse.

In April 1918 Elizaveta Fyodorovna was arrested, and on the night of July 17-18 she was shot along with the other members of the royal family. As witnesses testify, she died with the words of the prayer: "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do."

In 1992 the Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fyodorovna was canonized as a holy martyr. These are the words from the Act of Canonization of the Russian Orthodox Church:

The Grand Duchess Elizaveta, the foundress of the Marfo-Mariinsky Monastery in Moscow, devoted her pious Christian life to charity, to helping the poor and the sick. She received the martyr's crown on July 5 (old calendar), 1918. The Sanctified Council, having considered her feat and being convinced of her sufferings, resolved unanimously to canonize the Grand Duchess Elizaveta as a holy martyr.



Andrei Sakharov

Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov was born on May 21, 1921. After finishing school with excellence in 1938, he entered the Physics Department of Moscow University and graduated with excellence during the war, in 1942. A few years later he became the leader of a scientific association working on nuclear weapons. For the next twenty years he and his colleagues worked in top-secret conditions, first in Moscow, then in a special secret scientific center. All were confident of the importance of their work and felt overwhelmed by its grandiosity. In 1953 he was elected an academician of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. In the following decade Sakharov changed his political views. He began to see the moral problem surrounding the development of nuclear weapons and wrote in his autobiography:

Starting at the end of the '50s I began to speak actively for stopping or limiting nuclear tests. In 1961, because of this, I had a conflict with Khrushchev and in 1962 with the Minister of Medium Machine Building, Slavsky. I was one of the initiators of the Moscow agreement of 1963 about the banning of nuclear tests in three spheres (in the atmosphere, in water, and in space). From 1964 on, and especially in 1967, the circle of problems I was concerned about grew wider.

In 1966-67 I first spoke in defense of those who were repressed. By 1968 there appeared the need for expanded, open and frank speech. So an article appeared, entitled "Thoughts About Progress, Peaceful Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom." In fact, these very topics seven years later were marked in the title of my Nobel lecture — "Peace, Progress and Human Rights." I consider these topics to be fundamentally important and closely interconnected. This speech was the turning point in my life. It became widely known throughout the whole world. In the Soviet press "Thoughts" were long not spoken about, then they began to be mentioned in a disapproving manner. Many critics, though sympathizing, considered my thoughts to be naive and unrealistic. Now, 13 years later, I still think that some important turning points of world and even Soviet policy lie in the trend of these thoughts.

Since 1970, the protection of human rights and the protection of people who were victims of political reprisals became my main occupation. My participation in the Committee on Human Rights was one of the expressions of this position. Since July 1968, after my "Thoughts" were published abroad, I was deprived of secret work and the privileges of the Soviet elite. Since 1972, the pressure on myself and members of my family became



stronger, repression was growing around me, I learned about them more and more, and almost every day I had to speak for someone. Often I spoke on the problems of peace and disarmament, freedom of contact and movement, freedom of information and beliefs, against execution, and about the preservation of the environment and nuclear energy.

In 1975 I was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace. It was a great honor for me, the recognition of the achievements of the whole human rights movement in the USSR. In January 1980 I was deprived of all government benefits and deported to Gorky, where I live in conditions of almost complete isolation and under incessant police surveillance. This action by the authorities is absolutely unlawful; it is one of the links of political repression in our country in recent years.

I am not a professional politician; maybe that is why I am always concerned with questions of the aim and result of my actions. I think that only moral criteria together with objectivity can be a kind of compass in these complex and contradictory problems. I abstain from particular prognoses, but today, as ever, I believe in the power of the human mind and spirit.

Andrei Sakharov

Gorky, Russia, March 24, 1981

What was so extraordinary about this person? Why do so many people treat him with such respect? Although the style of his writing is not beautiful, behind it stand an unshakable strength of spirit, courage and crystal-clear honesty. These qualities brought several generations of Russians to see in Andrei Sakharov the symbol of goodness and the hope that in any circumstances one can be humane.

In his autobiography Sakharov omitted one other event. In 1979, soon after Soviet troops entered Afghanistan, he wrote a letter to Leonid Brezhnev, the leader of the Soviet Union, in which he expressed his criticism of the war. This became one of the main reasons for his exile to the city of Gorky (now Nizhny Novgorod).

While living in Gorky, Sakharov went on hunger strikes three times (in 1981, 1984 and 1985). During those years he spent a total of 300 days in the hospital. In spite of almost complete isolation from the outside world, he continued his public activities in defense of human rights. During these years he wrote one of his main public works, *The Danger of Thermonuclear War*. Was there any greater danger to the world during the years of the Cold War?

Andrei Sakharov was able to return to Moscow only in December 1986, and in less than three years, in the first democratic elections he was elected a USSR deputy from the Academy of Sciences. "I am the people's deputy. This turned out to be my main course," he said. These were not empty words for Sakharov. By the end of November 1989, he had presented to the constitutional committee his own proposal for a new Constitution.

In any situation, Sakharov retained his dignity as a person and his feeling of responsibility as a citizen. More than once he had to stand up for his convictions, and he resisted pressure that few people would be able to overcome.

He was a true prophet. A prophet in the ancient, original meaning of this word, calling his people to moral renewal for the sake of the future.

— Dmitry Likhachev
20th century Russian scientist
on Andrei Sakharov

In the evening of December 14, 1989, after a busy day, Andrei Sakharov went to bed, telling his wife, “I am going to have some rest. Tomorrow will be a difficult day. There will be a fight at the Congress.” These turned out to be his last words. During the night he passed away.

We have touched upon the lives of four people — representatives of different epochs and different views. What unites them? It is only one thing — love, which guided them in all their actions. Love toward their country, love toward people, love toward the whole world.

Prayer of St. Francis

The following is a prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, a thirteenth century saint from Italy, who was well known for his love of nature and his life of simplicity and poverty.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I

may not so much seek

To be consoled, as to console,

To be understood, as to understand,

To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

It is in dying that we are born

into eternal life.