

Mumbai.**13th May 2001.****EUREKA! I'VE DISCOVERED WHAT HONESTY IS ALL ABOUT!**

Last night, I was using public transport to get home after college. I was damn tired. Fortunately, after fighting my way through while boarding the bus, I sighted an empty seat. I simply slumped back into the seat without any further deliberations. Imagine my plight when after such an ordeal the bus conductor comes rushing at me only to ask me to vacate the seat immediately! I was angry and stared hard at the man. At that particular point, he was the perfect personification of the Satan. Nobody will leave you if stare at him the way I did, especially if the man happens to be the conductor of an over-crowded BEST bus. After all, he is the one and only supremo whilst on the bus. He yelled rather loudly at me. "Can't you see the board out there? Are you illiterate? Anyways, let me take the trouble of informing you that the seat is strictly reserved for women. I hope it won't make you a lesser person if you stand." I was totally taken aback at this sudden aggression from the enemy. All I could do was stare haplessly at the shoddily painted lettering at the back of the seat, which said "FAKT STRIYAN SATHI".

I accepted my fault but was mad at the misbehaviour of the man. I was fuming with anger, but silently this time.

At last the time came which no bus traveller actually liked - the time to pay for one's ticket. Although unwillingly, even more so due to the recent incident, I pulled out a hundred rupee note and literally slammed it into the palms of the conductor. This was a deliberate attempt on my part to bug the man considering that my ticket cost was a mere three rupees. The frustrated conductor searched through all his pockets to find change. Amidst all this he kept murmuring something about how passengers seek to trouble him every now and then.

It was this frustrated state of mind that perhaps led him to return twenty rupees more to me than what I deserved. I quickly noticed this. But my sense of hatred for the man forced me to keep quiet. This was an opportunity to have my revenge and therefore to draw level with him.

The extra twenty rupees were not letting me rest easy. My mind became the battleground for a feud between my conscience, which believed in something called as 'honesty', and my growing feeling of hatred for the conductor. For most of the time the latter had an upper hand. I would often say to myself, "Let that fool pay twenty rupees from his own pocket when he reaches the bus depot! He should also realise whom he has dared to cross swords with!"

But my conscience too wasn't in a mood to yield even an inch to the opposition. It kept repeating, "This is definitely not the right way to go about doing things. After all, the conductor was just doing his duty when he asked you to vacate your seat. Agreed that he could have been a little more polite, but you should try to forgive his rudeness considering the gruelling conditions under which he has to work. Be honest, return the money right away!"

"Honesty! Honesty! Honesty!" The word kept poking my brain. I thought to myself, "Is honesty practical in today's world? Wherever you go today, you would be greeted with unabashed shameful corruption. Why should I be the only torchbearer of this policy when all around me don't even give a damn? Had somebody else been in my position, would he have returned the money? I doubt."

After a gruelling battle, when the above thoughts came into my mind, it was clear evidence of my inclination to a particular side's arguments. I awaited one final reply from my conscience. This time it just said one sentence, "Just try being honest once, you'll know."

Somehow, the one liner moved me. I suddenly decided to give it a try. I patted the conductor from behind to call him. He was as angry as ever, expecting some more trouble from my side. I handed out a twenty-rupee note to him and told him the reason behind it, politely. I could spot the feeling of surprise on his face. His entire body language had changed in a second. He thanked me saying, "I'm a poor man, sir. I would have had to pay from my own pocket had you not returned the money. Honest people like you are very rare these days, sir, very, very rare. Thanks a lot."

I felt so relieved. I'm glad I heeded my conscience. These simple words and this simple incident have changed my approach towards life, forever.

Initially when I began writing this piece, my main aim was to inform readers of the inherent virtues like satisfaction, lack of guilt and a feeling of peace within the great quality of 'Honesty'. But I must accept that after reaching the fag end of this piece, I find myself unable to achieve this aim. If someone asks me "what is honesty?" Or "how does it feel to be honest?" Or "what all changes are likely to happen when one becomes honest?" I would not be able to answer them satisfactorily. The bliss that honesty brings cannot be explained or described. The satisfaction achieved is unparalleled. I can state this confidently from my own experiences. I'd only like to tell everyone what my conscience told me when I was just as confused.

"Give honesty a chance. The rest is automatic."