

# National Conscience and Democracy

For more clarity and better understanding of the main topics of the speech, I would like to briefly introduce a related well-known human element called conscience.

## **Conscience**

As observed, conscience is an invisible and untouchable entity residing within each human individual. It has no physical presence, taking no physical space in any human body. It is a mental process with the ability to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. In additions, it has demonstrated to have a power to inspire and/or direct human individual to behave and conduct him/herself and/or to exhibit itself through individual actions along the path of his/her life journey.

Even though it is amazing, this ability still needs guardrails to guide itself into being able to exhibit its capability. I would like to call those guardrails social values, which are variously derived from society past experiences and wisdom, local religions, custom, traditions, conventions, laws and principles, and culture believed and accepted to be solid foundations for individual and societal survival in peace and harmony with dignity, equal opportunity for prosperity and wellness. It can be looked at as a way and manner a member of a specific society should behave and conduct in a particular time, place and circumstance. In this context, conscience can be thought of as a moral compass with a moral sense of right and wrong. These values seem to be able to help guide the individual conscience into the right directions effectively for the society majority members comfortably accept to be right and good. It results in achieving the human noble goals of living in peace and harmony with dignity, prosperity opportunity and healthy existence within such society or nation for years, decades as well as for centuries.

One other factor should be closely examined. Humankind is a spacy born with greed, desire for freedom, and domination. When these characteristics becoming so strong to an uncontrollable level, individuals with such traits will become so selfish and dangerous to the society and nation. Generally, such individuals don't like to conform and comply with good common-sense social values, ethical laws, rules and regulations. Some might choose to live on the fringe of a society while others out of its boundary altogether. They are self-centered, only thinking that the right things are what that brings them successes, victories, wealth, influence, and ultimately power without regards to anyone's expense. They can think only for short term benefits and interests for themselves and themselves only. In order to take all these unwholesome actions, they enlist corrupted companions and accessories to act for their behalf. They may create many different shams, frauds and other cheating tools/methods to attain their unscrupulous ends. Should they be in a position of power these people would, most likely, become serious dangerous

threats to the society and nation. They can practically turn a free nation into a dictatorship for good, and the social noble goals will then fade away very quickly. Any recovery actions would come with shedding of blood and flesh without certainty of success in a far distant future.

## **National Conscience**

It is profoundly and well understood that members of a family heavily rely on one another for their own survival and progress in life. Together, a family can provide itself with some very basic and essential needs such as food, shelter, clothing, some medicines and protection, comfort, support and encouragement. An early education is also provided to enable members to fit themselves well within the society. Awareness of such critical dependency and reliance effects a robust love, affinity, compassion, sense of loyalty and other good neighborly qualities, which constitute what is called good family conscience among its members.

Family conscience is good, essential and necessary. However, it is not sufficient. Humans have been blessed by nature with much bigger and higher capacity brain power than that of animals, the most of them are armed with great brute physical power humans can't match. With this gift from nature, humans can think, develop languages for communications, understand possible benefits and dangers posed by animals and other human groups. With this high level of capability, human can organize groups, communities, societies and nations for further developments beyond the family capacity. With noble goals in mind, societies, especially nations, must be able to provide physical infrastructures to accommodate trade activities, communications, educations and research, healthcare, better shelters, food securities, and capacity for protection and defense against enemies from without and within alike.

For fairness and mutual respect, societies also need social and economic justice for it is one of many essential and important ingredients to allow them to acquire and uphold those noble goals for lasting human existence.

As the society develops and modernizes each grown-up member must also develop and upgrade his or her knowledge, resources, and saleable skills to well function in, and strengthen, the society and, by doing so, shape up his or her own life journey and destiny. Accommodating such required capacities and capabilities that each member needs, the whole society, thus the nation at large, collectively agrees, accepts and funds schools for education, learning and teaching, mental capacity and social development, adequate health care system, roads and bridges for travel and transportation, markets for, and marketing of, the family products, financial assistances, good common-sense justice system, robust protection against enemy within and enemy without to assure that its citizen can live a healthy life in safe environments and have good opportunities for prosperity, which should be considered as the end, or noble, goals for all mankind.

Achieving these necessary simple goals is observed throughout the world to be so difficult and complicated. The results are mixed. Some nations meet good successes for a good while and others experience failures upon failures. Success leads to achieving the noble goals while failure leads to undesirable disasters, tragedies, genocides, destructions, brutalities, massacres, etc. Little better come still various scary abrupt social events of uprooting, dislodging, dislocating, displacements forcing people to flee their lands and to become destitute refugees pleading other countries for a place to exist.

I would like to think that these results primarily depend on qualities of successive leadership groups/classes of each nation and, to a lesser extent, on the nation citizenry itself.

Therefore, the survival of every and each member of a family needs the society and the nation as much, if not more, as his or her family. Absence of one, one's life will be unfortunate and tragic as witnessed by millions of Cambodian people since the Khmer Rouge's 1975 takeover of Cambodia to present. Parents, grandparents, successive ancestral relatives and siblings all benefit in large part, over 50% by some measures, from the society and nation in addition to that drawn out of their family. For all fairness, social and economic justice, thus achieving the noble goals of life through such intertwined relationship between family, society/nation, country citizens with good heart and high morality should aspire to possess and exhibit a good National Conscience naturally and automatically. Otherwise, when a good number of citizen, for any reasons, does not see and understand such relationship and/or ignores it, that nation and its citizen will be doomed to suffer an unwanted/undesirable tragedy for a long period of time, if lucky enough, or forever.

## **Democracy**

Democracy has been a hot button issue and topic for observations and conversations these days. In Cambodia, democracy practically does not work as intended. Philippines pulls back from democracy and moves toward autocratic regime. Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Venezuela and Turkey move into dictatorship. Brazil and India are under autocratic control. In many Western democratic countries, increasing number of politicians come to the forefront seeking Presidency and exhibiting their tendency to move their respective nations toward dictatorship with alarming speed of acceptance by the populace. Many news reports suggest that the world nations appear to move away from democracy to dictatorship.

However, the most shocking of all is that the United States of America, the enduring beacon of democracy the whole world admires, and treasures is under serious attacks from within. The US Capitol Building, the Seat of the American Democracy, was violently attacked on January 6, 2021. The enduring beacon of

democracy suddenly becomes fragile in similar manner as in other countries as well. This tragic event left an even more serious worries, concerns and nervousness in the minds of American citizens as well as of the community of scholars who seek and try to identify problems and provide answers for a long time to come. I think it is now a special time to think over about democracy itself.

Centuries ago, nations started out with dictatorship in the form of fiefdoms, kingdoms, or empires. People were ruled by Chiefs, Kings or Queens, or Emperors or Empresses. People's life was at the mercy of their absolute rulers. This type of governance lasts for centuries creating and carrying on prolific abuses, corruptions, classism, ethnic discrimination and other evil deeds and behaviors with it on the part of the rulers, their lackeys and lieutenants, and the nation elites. As people's mental capacity further develops and advances, dissatisfactions and resentments towards such regime arise, and in turn, causing the emergence of another form of governance called Democracy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, featuring the United States of America.

Democracy is a self-governing form of political regime established by the people, from the people and for the people. These new ideas are great but untested. Under such ideas, neither king nor queen, nor chiefs, and neither emperor nor empress, but people, are the nation Masters. All nation resources, both seen and/or unseen, belong to the people. The nation leaders under the title of President, Prime Minister, Chancellor, or the like, are chosen from the people, by the people with a mission of serving the interests of the people in exchange for prominence, honor, power, recognition and support salary. The leaders' line of work in democracy is to handle public works on behalf and for the interests of the public at large, not for themselves, their families and friends or their close associates. One can easily understand that these leaders are simply nation managers hired to handle the nation and people affairs to effect nation and people's wellbeing and prosperity.

The new ideas surely showed that people decided to break away from the old abusive and corrupted form of governance. They rather sought for different and better ways for a new nation governance. Then came a Democracy, totally new and untested. It generated a high degree of excitement as well as anxiety and nervousness. No experience and past wisdom to base on, it is natural that this transformation would cause serious worries and concerns among early Americans of whether the regime would survive.

Understanding human nature being imperfect, limited in knowledge and wisdom, inclined for abuse and self-serving interest, easily subjected to corrupt temptations, Constitution and laws have been written to be the guardrails of governance, the rules of law or the rules of the majority, not of man. They have been used to establish a check and balance between the three branches of the US government: the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch and the Courts. Laws have been legislated for all levels of government. They are supposed to be very objective at a very high degree.

The strict application of the rules of law in handling public affairs has served many democratic countries very well. Those countries have experienced political stability, an essential ingredient for the countries' advancements. Western democracies are concrete proofs of success in providing respective nation people with remarkable progress socially, economically and psychologically for the most parts of many decades, except in a few major disruptions in the forms of World War I and World War II.

Having Constitution and laws written in books is great, but they don't have the capacity to exercise their power by themselves. They need good agents to perform and exert their power. Those agents must be humans. Those humans must be capable of well understanding the Constitution and laws and willingly, strictly and fairly or objectively applying them to the level of the people's expectation and acceptance. To live a life in peace, harmony and happiness, a nation must seek for agents, which are government leaders, who have been exhibiting high mental and intellectual capacity and high morality to lead the nation.

Why do we still have problems with democracy then? It is a good question. There's not enough space here to go into the details. In short, I think these problems are due to human nature. Selfishness has been a core component hidden in every heart and mind of every human. It keeps affecting human behaviors in the form of naturally generating a corrosive effect on the nation populace days and nights. This harmful effect is cumulative. It, in turn, leads to the creation of another effect called the erosion that wears down the public trust of, and belief in, the government from the populace. Leaving unattended for a long period of time, the temptation for self-interest becomes stronger and stronger to an uncontrollable and dangerous level. In such period all hell can break loose. One can readily observe that the morality level has moved down drastically. This phenomenon happens every day before our eyes even religions, traditions, customs, institutions of value, etc. can't escape it. Can we slow it down? The answer is a resounding YES. The populace must clearly understand that its interests and public or common interests are very closely tied together as explained in the "National Conscience" topic above. This essential relationship between the two interests is worth common people's defense and protection efforts. People must be very vigilant and aware of potential dangers lurking behind its back in the form of sugar-coated frauds, lies, flattering, good rhetorical soundbites, demagoguery, etc., which are repeatedly promulgated by any self-serving agents and/or agent candidates to grab or keep power disregarding other people wellbeing. Blind obedience, loyalty, faith, and beliefs won't help. The national interest and self-interest must be balanced, and such balance must be maintained by both the agents in power and the common people. National conscience of the common citizens is an overall key to preserving the peace, justice, prosperity and survival of the nation.

Historians have ranked the presidents of the United States of America. It is a mixed bag. Some are good while others are bad, and the rest are in between. Why can voters not avoid, at least, the bad ones?

There are no easy and clear answers to such challenges considering our human nature. Humans are frail and prone to get intensely trapped in self-serving interests. Generally, humans with low morality like to promote themselves without thinking much of negative consequences to others by their actions. Public or common interests are not as attractive to them compared to their self-interests.

In addition, most of the people may never think that the public or common interests have anything to do with them and the state of their lives. They usually think that only they and their family can provide all the needs and the necessary assistances for their existence. Then come complacency, negligence, impatience, etc., taking root in their mind, which collectively lead to deficiency in efforts in finding and choosing good agents to lead the nation. Others may think that others must do it, but not me. I'm too busy with having a good time. Many other excuses have been used to explain everything off.

On the other hand, the agents and agent candidates are human too. They are frail as well. With position of prominence, temptations for self-interests can easily be so great and uncontrollable. With less focused attention from the populace, they would be able to more easily find ways to fulfill their own interests at the expense of the whole country, including the people themselves. These behaviors on the part of the agents in position of power are very harmful to the society and nation. Some consequences may be very disastrous and detrimental to the population that may be forced to become destitute refugees fleeing to different places to just exist. At this stage, great dangers are lurking to manifest their destructive power toward humanity.

This short description should point out the essential roles to be played by both agents and/or agent candidates and the populace. The agents must have a mission to serve the interests of the country and its population only whether by creating laws, administering the laws, and guard railing the Constitution and laws. Those who perform well in their mission would likely be rewarded by being re-elected.

The populace, especially the voters, have an important essential role in choosing those agents to help them live in a safe environment with equal opportunity for prosperity and happiness. Accomplishing that role requires voters to be very vigilant, knowledgeable of life issues, and able to identify potential agent candidates with high mental and intellectual capacity and high morality. Picking the right agents is paramount essence for the voters to secure their safety, wellness, security and prosperity.

A still fresh turbulence in the United States of America pertaining to democracy pressed me to consult with my memory. Over a decade ago (maybe) I came across and read an interesting article touching on laws and morality. In a passage, the author quotes a western philosopher (probably Frenchman) saying in essence that laws do not work in every situation. Nations with high morality, laws are not needed, and others with low morality, laws will not work. I think he has good points.

In corrupted autocratic country like Cambodia, the laws don't work for everyone as intended. The other assessment is impossible to prove or disprove since the human society can be and have been historically corrupt. Several high-ranking religious figures that have been considered as of high morality, including popes, cardinals, head-monks and regular monks, etc., have been found to be corrupt too. With that fact, I would conclude that the human society and nation must have laws to help alleviate the situations created by human interactions. To make the laws work, human beings must possess a level of morality conducive to successful applications of the laws.

I would like to end my speech with a suggestion that a good level of morality must be maintained in society and nation to enable the strict application of the laws to fight against any reverberating attempts to subvert the democracy. Complacency, negligence, dishonesty, and ignorance are enemies of good national governance and political and social stability maintenance and preservation, that are required for a nation to have the capacity to live in peace and harmony with dignity, good opportunity for prosperity and healthy existence.

Thank you very much for listening.

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