

Repaying debt with integrity

Ananth Raman had negotiated hard for a handsome cut in the debt his company owed to a bank that was pulling out its operations in the US. As he related to William and Debra Miller, he found himself in a moral predicament.

There was an instance where I was not the decision maker; my boss was the one who had to make a very important decision. However, I was able to see the basis of this decision from a spiritual perspective only after it had happened. We had borrowed a large sum of money from a banker who wanted to pull out of their operations in the US, and we had a large multi-million dollar loan due to them.

I went to the lender and told them that since they were the ones who were leaving, we would like to pay them less than the total amount. I proposed a certain reduction in what we owed them, and we had an extensive discussion about this. With hesitation, they agreed to a reduction, but it was a smaller reduction than what I had proposed. Since we couldn't finalise the actual amount of the reduction, they had the head person from their London organisation come to the US to meet with our principle shareholder from Switzerland; and we decided to let those two people work it out.

I had briefed our principle shareholder, who was actually my immediate boss, on what had taken place up to that point. I suggested that he offer an amount for the reduction that was a little more than they had agreed to. I went into the discussions feeling very proud that I had negotiated this loan reduction, and had gained this extra income for the company.

As we moved toward this critical point during the talks, my boss suddenly said, "I have not come here to ask for this reduction, I will not do it." We had negotiated so hard for this reduction, and now this man was saying that he would not ask for this! He told them that we would in due time pay back the entire amount of the loan.

I was totally shocked. Here we had a huge gift of money available, and my boss was giving it away. Afterwards I asked him why he had done this, and he said, "As a businessman we have a responsibility. We are responsible not only to our shareholders, but also to our bankers. We have borrowed this money from them; we must repay it to them. This company is not bankrupt - we are able to pay this money to them. So there is absolutely no reason why we should take advantage of this situation just because they want to pull their operations out of the US. This is no way to do business."

I was really struck by all of this. He was not a religious person or anything like that. He was just a gentleman with a deep sense of values. He considered this loan not as something that we simply wrote down and now we can debate about whether to pay or not pay. Rather, he took it as an obligation to society.

The Spiritual Lesson

I felt this was a deep spiritual lesson for me. The lesson was that all obligations must be honoured. They must be paid back in the right way, not by arguing like this. I saw that all obligations, whether they are in cash, such as this, or in some other form, must be repaid in some way or another. This is my duty and I must honour that duty. I saw that

this was the only way to do business in this world.

Until now, I have never formally attempted to define spirituality. For a long time, spirituality was just a cliché, a word that all of us bandied around without any real understanding.

So I would say that my definition of spirituality would be the awareness of myself as part of supreme consciousness, that feeling of 'I,' those things that are within me. And then to extend that to mean that 'I' and the Divine are the same. The Divine is in all of us. I also believe spirituality is knowing the true core of being within you, and realising it is the same within everyone.

I believe there are three ways to inquire in these areas, in these directions: it can be through meditation, or self-inquiry, or even the study of knowledge.

In the end, if I had not looked at this situation from a spiritual perspective, I would have thought, "I did all of this hard work for this man, and he is not even appreciating it." My financial controller was with me, and he is still not convinced today that what my boss did was right. He still calls it a stupid decision, and I continue to tell him why it was not a stupid decision.

This article is part of a series of executive interviews William and Debra Miller of the Global Dharma Center have conducted for their international research program "Spiritual-Based Leadership". Mr. Ananth Raman is Chairman of Graphtex, Inc., New Jersey, USA. www.globaldharma.org/sbl-home.htm

