

Demands of Love and Reason
by Leo Tolstoy, translated by Aylmer Maude

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DEMANDS OF LOVE.

(An Extract from Leo Tolstoy's Private Diary.)

Translated by Aylmer Maude.

Yesterday (24th June, 1893), I thought:—Let us imagine people of the affluent class (for clearness' sake, say a man and a woman; it may be husband and wife, or brother and sister, or father and daughter, or mother and son), who have vividly realised the sin of a luxurious and idle life lived amidst people crushed by work and want.

They have left the town, have handed over to others (or in some way rid themselves of) their superfluities, have left themselves stocks and shares yielding, say, £15 a year for the two of them (or have even left themselves nothing), and are earning their living by some craft, say by painting on china, or translating good books, and are living in the country, in a Russian village.

Having hired or bought themselves a hut, they cultivate their plot of ground or garden, look after their bees, and at the same time give medical assistance (as far as their knowledge allows) to the villagers, teach the children, and write letters and petitions for their neighbours, &c., &c.

One would think no kind of life could be better. But, nevertheless, this life will be hell, or will become hell, if these people are not hypocrites and do not lie, i.e., if they are really sincere.

If these people have renounced the advantages and pleasures of life which town and money gave them, they have done so only because they acknowledge all men to be brothers—equals before their Father. Not equals in ability, or, perhaps, in worth; but equals in their right to life, and to all that life can give.

One may possibly have doubts as to the equality of people when one considers adults each with a different past, but doubt becomes impossible when one looks at children. Why should this boy have watchful care and all the assistance knowledge can give towards his physical and mental development, while that other charming child, of equal or even greater promise, is destined to become rickety, crippled, or dwarfed from lack of milk, and to grow up illiterate, wild, hampered by superstitions, a man representing merely so much brute labour—power?

Surely if people have left town life and have settled, as these have done, in the village, it is only because they, not in words only, but in very truth, believe in the brotherhood of man, and intend, if not to realise it, at least to begin the realisation of it in their

lives. And just this attempt to realise it must, if they are sincere, inevitably bring them into a terrible position.

With their habits (formed from childhood upwards) of order, comfort, and especially of cleanliness, they, on moving to the village, after buying or hiring a hut, have cleared it of insects, perhaps even papered it themselves, and installed some remains, not luxurious but necessary, of their furniture—say an iron bedstead, a cupboard, and a writing-table. And so they begin life. At first the country folk shun them; expect them (like other rich people) to defend their advantages by force, and therefore do not approach them with requests and demands. But presently, bit by bit, the disposition of the new comers gets known; they themselves offer gratuitous services, and the boldest and most insistent of the villagers find out practically that these new comers do not refuse to give, and that one can get something out of them.

Thereupon, all kinds of demands begin to be made upon them and constantly increase. A process commences comparable to the subsidence and running down to a level of the grains in a heap. They settle down till there is no longer any heap rising above the average level.

Besides the begging, natural demands for the division of what they have in excess of others make themselves heard, and apart from these demands, the new settlers themselves, being always in close touch with the village folk, feel the inevitable necessity of giving from their superfluity to those who are in extreme poverty. And not only do they feel the need of giving away their superfluity till they have only as much left as each one (say as the average man) ought to have, but there being no possible definition of this "average"—no way of measuring the amount which each one should have—there is no possibility of stopping, for crying want is always around them, and they have a surplus compared with this destitution.

It seems necessary to keep a glass of milk; but Matrena has two unweaned babes, who can find no milk in their mother's breast, and a two-year-old child which is on the verge of starvation. They might keep a pillow and a blanket, so as to sleep as usual after a busy day, but a sick man is lying on a coat full of lice, and is half-frozen at night, being covered only with bark-matting. They would have kept tea and food, but had to give it to some old pilgrims who were exhausted. At least it seemed right to keep the house clean, but beggar boys come and are allowed to spend the night, and again lice breed, after one has just got rid of those picked up during a visit to a sick man.

Where and how can one stop? Only those will find a point of stoppage who are either strangers to that feeling of the reality of the brotherhood of man which has brought these people to the village, or who are so accustomed to lie that they no longer notice the difference between truth and falsehood. The fact is, no such point of stoppage can exist; and if such a limit be found, it only proves that the feeling which prompted these people's act was imaginary or

feigned.

I continue to imagine these people's life.

Having worked all day, they return home; having no longer a bed or a pillow, they sleep on some straw they have collected, and after a supper of bread they lie down to sleep, it is autumn. Rain is falling, mingled with snow. Someone knocks at the door. May they refuse to open? A man enters wet and fevered. What must they do? Let him have the dry straw? There is no more dry, so they must either drive away the sick man, or let him wet as he is, lie on the floor, or give him the straw and themselves, since one must sleep, share it with him.

But even this is not all; a man comes who is a drunkard and a debauchee, whom they have helped several times, and who has always drunk whatever they gave him. He comes now, his jaw trembling, and asks for six shillings, to replace money he has stolen and drunk, for which he will be imprisoned if he does not replace it. They say they have only eight shillings, which they want for a payment due to-morrow. Then the man says, "Yes, I see, you talk, but when it comes to acts you're like the rest: you let the man you call a "brother" perish rather than suffer yourselves."

How is one to act in such cases? Let the fever-stricken man have the damp floor and lie in the dry place yourself—and you will be further from sleep than the other way. If you put him on your straw and lie near him—you will get lice and typhus. If you give the beggar six of your last shillings, you will be left without bread to-morrow; but to refuse—means, as he has said, to turn from that for the sake of which one lives.

If you can stop here, why could you not stop sooner? Why need you help people? Why give up your property and leave the town? Where can one draw the line? If there is a limit to the work you are doing, then it all has no meaning, or has only the dreadful meaning of hypocrisy.

How is one to act? What is one to do? Not to draw back means to lose one's life, to be eaten by lice, to starve, to die, and—apparently—uselessly. To stop is to repudiate that for the sake of which one has acted, for which one has done whatever good has been accomplished. And one cannot repudiate it, for it is no invention of mine, or of Christ's, that we are brothers and must serve each other; it is real fact, and when it has once entered you can never tear that consciousness out of the heart of man. How, then, is one to act? Is there no escape?

Let us imagine that these people, not dismayed by the necessity of sacrifice which brought them to a position inevitably leading to death, decided that this position arose from their having come to help the villagers with means too scanty for the work, and that the result would have been different, and they would have done more good, had they possessed more money. Let us imagine that they find

resources, collect immense sums of money, and begin to help. Within a few weeks the same thing will repeat itself. Very soon all their means, however great, will have flowed into the pits formed by poverty, and the position will be the same as before.

But perhaps there is a third way? Some people say there is; that it consists in increasing the enlightenment of the masses, that this will destroy inequality.

But this path is too evidently hypocritical; you cannot enlighten a population that is constantly on the verge of perishing from want. And, moreover, the insincerity of people who preach this is evident from the fact that a man eager for the realisation of equality (even though it be through science) could not live a life the whole tenor of which supported inequality.

But there is yet a fourth way: that of aiding in the destruction of the causes which produce inequality—aiding in the destruction of force, which produces it. And that line of action must occur to all sincere people who try in their lives to carry into effect their consciousness of the brotherhood of man.

The people I have pictured to myself would say, "If we cannot live here among these people in the village; if we are placed in the terrible position that we must necessarily starve, be eaten by lice, and die a slow death, or repudiate the sole moral basis of our lives—this is because some people store up accumulations of wealth while others are destitute; this inequality is based on force; and therefore, since the root of the matter is force, we must contend against force."

Only by the destruction of force, and of the slavery which results from force, can a service of man become possible which will not necessarily lead to the sacrifice of life itself.

But how is force to be destroyed? Where is it? It is in the soldiers, in the police, in officials, and in the lock which fastens my door. How can I strive against it? Where, and in what? It is here that we find people, revolutionists, who, whilst maintaining their own lives altogether under the system of force, strive against this force, opposing violence to violence.

But for a sincere man this is impossible. To fight force by force means merely to replace the old violence by a new one. To help by "culture," founded on force, is to do the same. To collect money, obtained by violence, and use it to aid people impoverished by force, means to heal by violence wounds inflicted by violence.

Even in the case I have imagined; not to admit a sick man to my hut and my bed, and to refuse the six shillings because I can, by force, retain them, is also to make use of compulsion. Therefore, in our society the struggle against force does not, for him who would live in brotherhood, eliminate the necessity of yielding up his life, of being eaten by lice, and of dying, whilst at the same time, always

striving against violence, preaching non-resistance, exposing violence, and above all giving an example of non-resistance and of self-sacrifice.

Dreadful and difficult as is the position of a man living the Christian life, amidst the life of violence, he has no path but that of struggle and sacrifice—sacrifice without end.

One must realise the gulf that separates the verminous, famished millions from the over-fed, over-dressed rich; and to fill up this gulf we need sacrifices, and not the hypocrisy with which we now try to hide from ourselves the depth of the gulf.

A man may lack the strength to throw himself into the gulf—but it cannot be escaped by anyone who seeks after life. We may be unwilling to go into it, but let us be honest about it, and say so, and not deceive ourselves with hypocritical pretences.

And, after all, the gulf is not so terrible. Or, if it be terrible, yet the horrors which await us in a worldly way of life are more terrible still.

There is less danger of death from lice, infection, or want after giving away one's last crust to help others, than there is of being killed at the manœuvres or in war.

Lice, black bread, and want seem so terrible. But the bottom of the pit of want is not so deep after all, and we are often like the boy who clung by his hands, in terror, all night, to the edge of the well into which he had stumbled fearing the depth and the water he supposed to be there, while a foot below him was the dry bottom.

Yet we must not trust to that bottom; we must go forward prepared to die. Only that love is true love, which knows no limit to sacrifice—even unto death.

(From the Private Diary.)

A very strange and happy thing has happened to me of late. I have begun to feel the possibility of the uninterrupted happiness of love. I used to be so crushed by the wickedness around me, and in my own heart, that I could only speak and think of love in imagination. But now I am beginning to feel its blessedness. It is as though little flames of light and warmth were beginning to pierce through a damp wood fire; and I believe, know, and feel, love and goodwill—and I see now what can hinder and bedim them.

I look upon the ill-feeling I bear certain people in quite a new way now, and fear it, because I know it hides light and warmth from me. And I am persuaded that in this feeling of love and pity I have found the secret of true life, which alone gives uninterrupted peace and joy...

I think, and not only think, but feel, that I can love those who are called wicked but who are only in error. I used to think it impossible to show people their mistake and sin without hurting them. "Is it possible to pull out a tooth without giving pain? Yes, cocaine and chloroform can allay physical suffering; but there is nothing of the kind for the soul." Thus I thought, but then immediately said to myself, "No: there is a spiritual chloroform. Here, as in other things, the body has been studied thoroughly, but the soul has not yet been considered. The operation of cutting off a leg or an arm is done with chloroform; whereas the operation of mending a man's soul is done without, and it hurts. That is why it often does not cure, but only causes a worse illness—that of ill-will. And yet there is a spiritual chloroform, and it is well known; it is always love."

And that is not all: it is possible to perform a physical operation satisfactorily without chloroform, but the soul is extremely sensitive, and so every operation performed without the anæsthetic of love must always be disastrous. The patients know this, and that they ought to have the chloroform, and they always ask for it; and then the doctors are angry. "What do they want?" they say, as I have said many times. "They ought to be thankful to me for curing them, for cutting out their sores; and they say they don't want to suffer. They ought to be glad of what I do for them—and they want more." But the patient won't listen to these arguments; he suffers, and cries out, and hides the sore parts, and says, "You can't cure me, and I don't want to be cured; I will go on as before, if you can't help me without giving me pain."

And he is right. What is a spiritual illness? It is error, the loss of the right path, the non-fulfilment of the law, the entanglement in the net of temptation. What then are those to do, who, moved by the ties that unite all men, and knowing themselves to be in the right path, try to help the others and to deliver them from the nets of temptation? A man who has just turned into the wrong path can be simply pulled back, and it will not hurt him; but the man who is caught fast in the net cannot be pulled back—that would hurt him too much; he must first be disentangled very gently and softly. And that is just the chloroform of love. If you do not do this, what is the result? I see a man caught in a net and held fast by his neck and hands and feet. I want to help, and so I catch hold of him at random and begin to pull; and I strangle him, cut his flesh, and entangle him worse. The closer a man is caught, the more he needs love.

I understood this a little before, now I understand it fully, and am beginning to feel it.

My Father, help me!

DEMANDS OF REASON

(A short article on Reason and Religion written by Tolstoy by request)

To those who ask my opinion whether it be desirable to endeavour, by the aid of reason, to attain complete consciousness in one's inner spiritual life, and to express the truths thus attained in definite language, I would answer in the affirmative.

Every man, in order to achieve his destiny on earth and to attain true welfare—the two are synonymous—must continually exert all his mental faculties to solve for himself, and clearly to express, the religious foundations on which he lives—that is, the meaning of his life.

I have often found among illiterate labourers who have to deal with cubic measurements an accepted conviction that mathematical calculations are fallacious and not to be trusted. Whether this arises from their ignorance of arithmetic, or from the fact that those responsible for the calculations have often cheated them, the conviction that mathematics is unreliable and worthless has taken root among them and become an unquestioned fact.

A similar opinion exists among men who, I will boldly say, are bereft of true religious feeling: that reason is unequal to the solution of religious questions; that applying reason to such questions leads to error; and that doing so is sinful pride.

I mention this because the doubt expressed—whether one should strive for clarity in religious conviction—may arise from the belief that reason cannot be applied to such questions.

Man has been given by God one single instrument for attaining knowledge of himself and of his relation to the universe: there is no other—and that instrument is reason.

Yet he is told he may use reason for domestic, political, scientific, or artistic questions—but not for the very problem for which it was especially given: the meaning of life.

He is told to accept truth by revelation or faith. But a man cannot believe independently of reason. If he believes one thing and not another, it is because his reason tells him what is credible.

To forbid reason is like telling a man lost in dark catacombs that,

in order to find his way out, he must extinguish his lamp.

It may be objected that not everyone possesses a great intellect or the ability to express thoughts clearly, and that this may lead to error.

To this I reply in the words of the Gospel:
"Things hidden from the wise and prudent have been revealed unto babes."

This is not paradox, but truth. Every being is given a law to follow, and the means to recognise it. Every man is endowed with reason, and through reason the law is revealed.

It is hidden only from those who refuse to follow it—those who cast aside reason and accept the assertions of others who have done the same.

The law is so plain that it is accessible even to a child. No one must discover it anew. Those before us have expressed it; we must verify it—not by testing reason with tradition, but by testing tradition with reason.

Tradition may be false; reason comes from God and cannot be false.

Thus, no special capacity is needed to recognise truth—only trust in reason as the sole instrument for understanding it.

Special intellectual effort is required not for truth, but for error.

Once men abandon reason and accept beliefs blindly, they accumulate contradictions so complex that great intellect is needed merely to defend them.

Consider a man educated in any Christian confession—Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant—who tries to reconcile its teachings:

- * A righteous God creates evil
- * God punishes and demands redemption
- * A religion of love coexists with war and injustice

To conceal such contradictions requires great effort.

But to understand the law of life requires only this:

- * Reject what contradicts reason
- * Guard reason

* Trust it fully

If the meaning of life seems obscure, this does not prove reason is insufficient—it proves that too much irrational belief has been accepted.

Everything unsupported by reason must be set aside.

Therefore, the answer to whether one should strive for clarity in spiritual life is clear:

This is the most necessary and important task of life.

It is necessary because the only reasonable conception of life is the fulfilment of the will of God.

And this will is revealed not through miracles, sacred books, or institutions, but through the reason of all men—communicated through life itself.

This knowledge is never complete; it grows with humanity.

The longer we live, the more clearly we understand what we must do.

Thus, the effort of every person—no matter how insignificant he may seem—to clarify and express religious truth is among the most sacred duties of man.

(Letter to a Friend)

I have received your many letters, and I wish to answer their main points.

I will not respond to your assumptions that I am angry, that I deny life beyond death, or that I neglect charitable duties; these have been addressed elsewhere.

But I wish to help you in what I see as your dangerous state: your attempt to force yourself back into Church faith.

This is dangerous because it leads to the loss of reason—man's most valuable possession.

There are sincere people who adopt beliefs not to justify privilege,

but because they seek truth.

A lady once told me she believed "as a peasant woman believes," thinking it wise.

But this is impossible.

She knows science, history, and other religions. She knows contradictions in doctrine. She cannot truly believe as the peasant believes.

The peasant's belief corresponds to her understanding; the lady's does not.

True faith must harmonise with knowledge and illuminate life—not contradict it.

The lady clings to such belief to justify her life of luxury.

But you—exiled for seeking truth—why embrace contradiction?

Consider your position:

You live in a vast universe, among billions, in a particular place and time. Your relation to God must be universal—valid for all men.

Yet what do you profess?

That truth was revealed to one small nation; that salvation is confined to a church; that rituals determine fate.

Such beliefs, stated plainly, would seem absurd to a rational person.

This is the result of early conditioning.

But Christ's true teaching remains—sufficient, universal, and rational.

It establishes a relation not to a sectarian God, but to the infinite Source of all.

Christ teaches:

- * The Source of all is spiritual, rational, and loving
- * Man participates in this Source

* True life is spiritual, not animal

Man must shift his identity from the body to the spirit.

In doing so:

- * Suffering disappears
- * Freedom is attained
- * Death loses meaning

This teaching is universal, not exclusive. It unites all truth.

Why abandon it for ancient dogmas of sacrifice and ritual?

To accept irrational belief is to destroy reason.

And the destruction of reason is the greatest ruin.

(On Miracles)

All knowledge of the material world comes through the senses and their relations.

A miracle would mean a violation of these relations.

Such an event would indicate either error or illness—not truth.

In the spiritual realm, however, there are no such laws.

To say Christ lives spiritually is truth.

To say he rose physically is a misunderstanding of sensory experience.

REASON AND LOVE

(From the Private Diary)

To fulfil the will of God, both reason and love are required.

- * Reason without love becomes sterile
- * Love without reason becomes blind

Truth is the fruit of reason.

Righteousness is the fruit of love.

Only when united do they produce good.

Final Reflection

Mill says humanity benefits when each pursues his own happiness within limits.

This is true only if happiness means spiritual fulfilment—alignment with conscience, reason, and love.

Let each seek the Kingdom of God, and the welfare of all will follow.