

Chapter 4

LEARNING FROM NATURE

A Chinese bamboo tree, if watered regularly takes 5 years before yielding any seedling or sprout. It barely grows in the first 5 years, one has to wait and nourish it properly. But when it starts growing, it grows to a height of 90 feet in the next 6 weeks. The cause of this growth is the elaborate root that enables it to grow really fast; the root is developed during the five years when seemingly there is no growth. Some people think that the effort put in watering it is useless, as they are not able to see much progress in the first five years, but they are not aware of what is happening inside. The effort which is put in watering it is not wasted; in fact it enables growth by building a strong foundation.

Similarly in life, when you find that you are not able to see the results despite your efforts, remember that it may take some time but eventually you will see the progress. By making persistent efforts you ensure a strong foundation for your success. Success which comes without a solid foundation is temporary. You will be suitably rewarded on the basis of your actions. Don't get disheartened, no effort is ever wasted, it will bear fruit at the right time. Continue making effort; an honest effort never ends in failure.

Karma

Karma is the sum total of our acts. It includes breathing, thinking, talking, hearing and everything that one does. Everything that you do constitutes your karma. When you do something noble, you acquire credit for that. As you act, so you are rewarded; nothing happens in a disorderly manner in this universe; there is a law governing our actions. Even Newton's third law of motion says that every action has equal and opposite reactions.

The law of karma that whatever action you perform, be it in thought, word or deed, you will be rewarded or punished according to your actions.

You are completely responsible for your actions and their consequences. If you do good deeds, you will get good results. If you do bad things you will get bad results. You may not get the results immediately but sooner or later you will be given the just fruit for your actions.

So if you do good deeds, you will get good return. If you do sinful activities, you will incur suffering and misery. It may not happen immediately or right away but it is like a bank, when you are doing good deeds, it is like depositing money in the bank, which you will get back. But if you are doing bad and sinful activities, it is like taking a loan, it is like incurring a debt, which you need to pay back.

There is a story about the Scottish scientist, Alexander Fleming, who discovered penicillin. He was once asked the reason for his success, and in his answer he attributed his success to his patience. He further said that he had developed patience as he had to walk 6 kms to go to school. This just shows that you never know when and in which way your efforts will be rewarded but surely every effort is rewarded sooner or later and this is what the law of karma says. Sometimes we do not know what is best for us and whine at small things, Alexander Fleming would not have known the importance of walking to the school when he was a young boy but eventually the role it played in his life was significant. Similarly, every effort that you put in will be suitably rewarded.

Be thankful to nature

I owe a lot to trees, for they teach me to stand for others unconditionally.

I owe a lot to nature, for it teaches me to work effortlessly and harmoniously.

I owe a lot to the sky, for it teaches me that there is no limit to achievements.

I owe a lot to ocean for it teaches me to remain silent amidst disturbances.

I owe a lot to the grass, for it teaches me to grow in silence.

I owe a lot to the river, for it teaches me to flow, otherwise life would be stagnant.

I owe a lot to the earth, for it teaches me to remain grounded under all circumstances.

I owe a lot to the seasons, for they teach me the value of change.

I owe a lot to the sun, for it teaches me to dispel darkness and brighten others.

I owe a lot to the stars, for they teach me the value of discipline.

I owe a lot to the lotus, for it teaches me to grow irrespective of its environment.

I owe a lot to the time, for it teaches me that my existence is transient.

I owe a lot to the mountains, for they teach me the value of resoluteness.

I owe a lot to the day and night, for they teach me the value of regularity.

I owe a lot to the sunflower, for it teaches me to look at the bright things in life.

Cultivate the habit of being thankful for life; many a time we miss so many small things which make life beautiful; we miss them because we are looking for something else and in doing so we miss what is. Appreciate what is and be thankful for it. So many great things in nature lie unexplored just like the vast potential in a human being. Learn to explore and exploit that which is available to you and be grateful for it. A rich life is a life lived with a grateful attitude. Gratitude shows the way you look at things. Gratitude decides your altitude. When you are grateful it shows that you have found something good and are thankful for it; it shows that you look at what is rather than fret and fume over what is not.

Learning success secrets from nature

'All actions are perfected by qualities of nature.'

—Lord Krishna

If you are open and want to learn, there are sources of inspiration everywhere. The first thing is to be open-minded, then observe carefully and finally practise. Practise what you learn until it becomes a habit.

Look around and you will find a lot of things which can inspire you. Dattatreya, an incarnation of God according to the Hindu mythology, is supposed to have 24 gurus, Dattatreya, who was himself almighty and all, knowledgeable, depicts the value of learning by seeking to learn and practise every moment. His gurus or teachers include flowers, pythons, bees, elephants, fish, moths, air, water, earth, etc. He had as many as twenty four gurus, which shows that lessons are available everywhere, one just needs to have an attitude to learn. Look around and you will find inspiration from many sources which will play the role of catalysts in your life.

Dattatreya also teaches the value of humility; even though he was all-powerful and learned, his keenness to learn is a lesson for all mortals.

Nature always teaches us; it is always giving us hints and lessons. It has inspired the likes of Milton to compose the best poems, and inspired Newton to discover gravitation. Nature always works harmoniously; it looks effortless; but if you study carefully you will notice that the most complicated and difficult processes are going on synchronously; that is what makes it look effortless. Similarly, a man who does his work in a synchronised manner and in harmony with his aptitude achieves success.

Great minds learn from all sources. Look at Walt Disney who saw a mouse and got inspiration to create *Mickey Mouse*. So many answers present in nature are waiting to be explored, so many truths are there to be unveiled, so many treasures are there to be traed; nature has all of them. Look at the pattern in which the petals appear on a flower; that is exactly equal to the well-celebrated Fibonacci number in mathematics. Wilbur Wright noticed that the soaring birds twist their wings to restore balance; he warped the wings of the aircraft to achieve the same effect. Nature is inspirational; it is the source of many a great achievement.

Interdependence

Many scientists who have studied the interdependence among the species in nature, have found that every specie, no matter however small it be, makes its contribution to and plays its part in maintaining the harmony in nature.

The bumble-bee carries the power of service and depicts interdependence prevalent in nature. They are important pollinators of many plants. As a bee lands on one flower, collecting its nectar, pollen also attaches itself to the leg fibres. It is then transferred to other flowers, creating a fertilisation process. Their movement from one plant to another symbolises the interconnectedness of all living things. Nature shows that we live in an interdependent world; It teaches us that we are all in some way or the other dependent on others, though we may not be aware of it. It shows the precision and beauty of existence.

Diamonds

The hardest known substance on this planet is diamond. Diamond is made up of carbon. Carbon subjected to extremely high pressure and heat for a long time becomes diamond. The natural place where the extreme conditions needed to form diamonds exist is deep inside the earth.

Even the smallest of diamonds is precious; similarly, in life small things have a lot of value. Never neglect them. A diamond is the hardest

known substance; the intense heat and pressure make it the hardest substance, so also in life when you are going through pressure and difficult times it is the process which may be necessary for you to grow, to become a better and a tougher person. It is that process which strengthens you as a person. Diamonds are brought to the surface of the earth by volcanic emission. The hot molten lava cools down and solidifies into rock within which diamonds can be found. So when you face a tragic situation, an upheaval in your life, it has something good to offer to you. You may not know that when you experience it, but be patient and you will realise the value of these experiences with the passage of time.

Finally, the qualities of men are shaped by the struggles and tough times that they have to face; this phase adds value and strength to their character and makes them rare and precious among men like the diamonds among gems.

Adaptability

‘Life is all about changing to adapt and adapting to change.’

The chameleon is noted for its ability to change colour in response to light, heat and other stimuli. It changes its colour in order to escape from danger. It is a good example of adaptability according to the situation, which can maximise your chances in all circumstances. Don't get into a mental rut and don't develop an unnecessary attachment with things; move on and appreciate whatever you are presented with and do your best. Be firm of values and adaptable otherwise. Things are not always as you want them to be. The art is to adapt yourself to circumstances and enjoy the experience. Adaptability gives you a larger perspective in life. It widens your horizon. A rich life is full of experiences. Being adaptable to people, places, culture, food and the environment is the root of success.

Nature shows that several animals have become extinct due to changes in the atmosphere and surroundings. The biggest reason for their extinction is that these animals unlike others were not able to adapt themselves to the changes in nature. Adapting to changes is really difficult; some animals do it better than others and they survive. Thus adaptability is a must for survival. So also in the case with human beings; adaptability plays a big role in making you successful and survive; in the modern world, the speed with which the information, business and other things change is quite high. Unless you are adaptable, chances are that you will not be very successful. To maintain success, you have to adapt to changes and show flexibility to move along with the world.

Synergy effect

The report, published in the journal *Nature*, suggests that formation flight was part of the evolution of birds. Not only does pattern-flying help the birds fly farther, it allows them to communicate with each other on the wing; it is efficient. A V formation helps the birds conserve energy because the V-shaped air streams created by the birds in front reduce the wind resistance for the other birds. When the lead bird gets tired, another bird takes over and thus the birds help each other in this manner. What this suggests is that if each one collaborates the weakness of one is covered by the strength of the other, and we can literally astound ourselves with our achievements. Collaboration can conquer your weaknesses. Learn to work around with people having complementary skills. This is the essence of synergy effect, which essentially means, if 10 people collaborate and work together they should be able to produce more work than they would produce working independently.

The art of management teaches us that we must all learn to work with others and overcome the difficulties. The idea is to maximise the strength and minimise the weaknesses by mutual support.

Bee

A bee goes to the flower and collects the nectar from the flower; it sits inside the flower and collects the nectar from the flower, but in the evening the flower closes and the bee gets trapped in the flower. This happens due to excessive attachment of the bee to the nectar; it gets trapped and thus invites suffering for itself; it dies inside the flower. Similarly, for everything in life there comes a time when you have to say, enough is enough, otherwise you will be entrapped. You must be careful, for when you are seeking pleasure you may be trapped by the pleasures. You should be careful not to get entrapped by the pleasures. You must know when to come out of them, otherwise life can be a trap. Be judicious to say no to the things which can entrap you.

Work out the details

***'I learned very early the difference between knowing
the name of something and knowing something'***

—Richard Feynman

If you look at the rainbow, you will see a beautiful spectrum of seven colours which is very attractive and charming. But science has proved that rainbow is nothing but an optical illusion, that it does not exist in reality; and that it is merely an optical phenomenon. Although it looks

real, it is not so. This fact became known only when someone studied the details of the rainbow carefully. When you see things superficially, without working out the details, you do not get to the real thing. Success lies in working out the minute details; that is what makes a great artist, a great professional and a successful man. All people float on the surface but very few people work out the minute details; the real difference lies in working out the details in which success lies. Anyone can play a musical instrument but a musical maestro plays the same instrument with precision, great skill and rhythm, which makes him stand apart from others. Success lies in working out the details.

‘Success is a rainbow of persistence, optimism, patience, hard work, self belief, sacrifice and preparation’

Guard against activity which takes you nowhere

If you throw a stone in a pond, a wave is created, which creates a ripple effect on the surface of water. But if you observe closely you find the water does not go anywhere, it stays there, although activity can be seen on the surface of the pond. At times, similar is the case with our work; we do something, we are busy, involved in some activity, but going nowhere. Activity alone does not guarantee progress. Watch carefully and analyse how you act, in which direction you are headed. Contemplate before you act in order to act better; before doing something ask yourself, is it really worth doing, where will it take me? And then act. Act in a manner which gives you progress not just activity.

‘You don’t find pearls floating on the ocean’

It is a well-established fact that you dive deep into the sea to find pearls; you do not get them by watching from a distance. A lot of training and effort is required to get the pearls; similarly a lot of hard work has to be put in to get success. You cannot sit back waiting for things to happen; it is not guaranteed that you will get the pearls when you dive, but by doing so you maximise your chances to get them. In the same way by working hard and going to the depth of things you increase your chances of success manifold.

‘Grass always looks greener on the other side, but it makes no difference if you are aiming the sky’

The goat has a tendency that it grazes for a few seconds one patch of grass and then immediately goes to a far distant patch of grass, even though there is plenty of grass in the first patch itself. Similar is the tendency of a man; though enough opportunity is there, one still looks on it, and finds that the other people’s work is more lucrative and has more

opportunities. The other person's work looks easier merely because you do not have to do it.

There are only two ways of looking at things: one is to do your job to the best of your ability and stay focused and the other is to look at the work of others and regret what you are doing. The people who are busy doing work, who love their work are the people who are at the top; they have their eyes fixed on the goals and are too busy to look at the other side; truly speaking, they are focusing on the top and do not let their attention be diverted by anything.

You can see the thorns and say awful,

You can see the rose and say wonderful.

But greatness lies in seeing both roses and thorns alike.

See things in the right perspective; in life you will have moments of joy and sorrow; at times we tend to get overjoyed when things are going well and too depressed when things are not going well. The calm and composed people handle both the situations without being ruffled; instead, they develop dispassion, such that they appreciate whatever they are offered by life. They are the people who do not make a fuss about things, they do not complain, they do not make excuses; they do not overcelebrate; they focus on the things that really matter. They keep a sense of perspective, which helps them achieve a lot of success.

***'Go to the ant, thou sluggard!
consider her ways and be wise.'***

—6.6 proverbs, Bible

The Bible instructs mankind to follow the ant; science has also revealed some fascinating facts about the ants; the ant is very industrious; most of the ants live in communities; they do their activities and display an exemplary behavior. Their activities include gathering food and hunting. Within a community each ant knows its place and performs its duties with total commitment.

Worker ants are very hardworking and committed; they are persistent and do their work with full loyalty and dedication to the community. Their persistence and ability to work hard is a lesson for all.

The power of ant lies in teamwork. Each ant does its part of the work to ensure the survival and good health of the whole colony, regardless of the role it has been assigned. If the ant has to fight, it will; if the ant has to dig tunnels, it will; if the ant has to carry leaves for miles, it will; it does all for the good of the community.

The ant works unselfishly and always looks after the fellow ants. They are naturally driven to work for the good of the community. They teach us the value of service.

The queen ant has wings until it is fertilised; once it is fertilised, it pulls out its wing which inhibits its flight for the sake of the new born ant and depicts selflessness.

Devastating nature

Man is well acquainted with Nature's fury. Nature can be devastating in the form of earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones and what not. Nature can inflict severe punishment. Scientists have often observed that the cause of most of the devastating occurrences is the imbalance caused in nature. This imbalance becomes detrimental to man. Nature is at its harmonious best when it is working in a balanced manner. This is a big lesson for man; as long as one works in a balanced manner, one is peaceful but when there is an imbalance in life, life becomes devastating. We are not machines, we are people having emotions. It is important to strike a balance between your vocation, your family, your beliefs, your relationships, your health and your friends. True prosperity comes when you manage things properly and lead a balanced life.

Flightless birds

Not all birds fly. It is a well-known fact. All such birds, despite having lost their power to fly millions of years ago, have wings. Many of these birds (e.g. the great auk) lived on isolated oceanic islands where there were no predators. Since these birds did not need to fly to escape any predator, they gradually lost the power to use their wings. Man has many faculties, dormant powers and a brain with extraordinary capabilities which ordinarily remain unused if one does not use these powers for a long time; they also become useless as the wings of the birds which do not fly. Develop a higher sense of perspective in your life and live with a purpose, with a cause, with a desire to do something noble, something big, and you will draw upon reserves of energy, which otherwise remain unutilised. Getting things too easily is not necessarily good in the long run.

Power of a seed

A small seed, equal to a mustard in size, grows to become a huge banyan tree; a seed, equal to that of a tomato seed or an oat flake, becomes a redwood tree or scientifically known as the sequoia tree, which is around

300 feet in height, that is, around 50 times the height of an average man, and the root of the sequoia tree encompasses an area around 3 to 4 acres.

An amazingly small seed has the potency to hold such a huge tree sounds quite incredible. Within the small seed, lies dormant the ability to create a big tree. Saints have often compared the seed to a thought; a tiny seed has the capability of developing into a huge tree; in the same manner a thought if it is harnessed and acted upon can develop into massive achievements.

But the seed does not sprout unless properly tended and nurtured, so also even the best of ideas do not succeed unless they are developed and acted upon promptly. Never waste the most powerful resource of the human mind, that is, the thought.

Though the seed is small, it has the potential to hold a tree as big as the redwood. Small things develop into big things when they are followed up rigorously, optimistically, regularly and patiently.

‘Nothing big can be achieved by thinking small.’

It was the potency of the thought, an idea, that made a clerk resign and start a business of his own. This man did not even have proper school education but he had the ability to think big and the ability to make his idea grow. The company that he launched later became the biggest private company in India, known as the ‘Reliance Group.’ The man behind this phenomenal success was Dhirubhai Ambani. He nurtured a thought, harnessed it and later it manifested itself as the Reliance Group of Industries. The ability to follow it through and make it happen lies within you. You can have many thoughts and ideas in your life but ultimately it is your ability to eventually make them happen that really matters.

Perception is not reality

Have you ever looked at the spider’s web? See the spider silk once again. If somebody were to tell you that it was one of the strongest materials in the world, stronger than steel, surely you would not believe it. But it is a fact; according to a research paper published in the journal, *Nature*. The spider silk has the tensile strength to density ratio which is approximately five times greater than steel. The spider silk is thinner than human hair, lighter than cotton and stronger than steel. It is quite amazing! When you look at it, you cannot fathom the great science involved behind the silk generated by the spider. Our perception has a limit; it is based on the limitations of senses. Never close your options; you just never know what will work. Everything that you do, no matter howsoever insignificant it may seem, has the potential to change your life. The things

which seem insignificant can make a significant impact as your life. Don't limit your perception without the exact knowledge of the reality. Your perception may not be always correct.

Eagle

An eagle has an incredible amount of patience. It can be seen sitting on a tree in the same posture for hours together; the eagle teaches us the value of patience.

Vision: An eagle has an immaculate vision; even when it is flying in the sky at a great height it keeps an eye on the ground and its target. It catches its prey in a flash as and when it finds the opportunity. It teaches us that irrespective of our position we must not lose focus on what we want in life. What matters most is on what thing you are focusing. To grab an opportunity you have to be as the lookout for it.

Ability to fly during storms: lesser birds do not venture out during storms, but eagles fly even during storms. They teach us to fight against our troubles in life and face them boldly instead of shying away from them.

It thrives on what it hunts; the eagle does not eat dead meat. It teaches us the value of self-effort; so many times we depend on others for doing a work when we are quite capable of doing it ourselves. Be a self-starter and deserve what you get.

Caretaking: Even though it is known as a fierce bird, it is very protective towards its little ones. This it sets an example for all human beings to care for and nurture the young ones.

Extra effort at the end

There are migratory birds which move to locations which are more suitable for their existence; the migration of the birds requires them to travel thousands of miles.

The ability of the birds to successfully navigate thousands of miles and to know when the time is right to do so is amazing. When the birds are crossing the ocean they get tired towards the end and an extra effort is required when it seems most difficult to cross the ocean. So the birds have to make an extra effort if they have to successfully cross the ocean.

The goal looks farther than it is once you are tired; the birds teach us to make an extra effort to cross the hurdle and achieve the goal. An effort when the going becomes difficult and tough is required to meet the challenges of life. Just hang on and keep going till you the hurdles and reach the destination.

‘When you notice the great things in nature you wonder why you didn’t notice them earlier’

But so is nature. It gives us clues; very few are those who pick up value from this treasure which goes unnoticed, be it a morning which is a treasure in itself, for it means that you still exist; thank God that you are there today; everybody has a limited number of mornings, though one never thinks that way. Be ready to conquer the challenges, be ready for the struggle, there is nothing that you cannot do today. The ever so punctual sun has something to offer you, the freshness and the promise of the morning are there to stay with you. You are what you do today, for tomorrow is not certain. Yesterday is forgotten, today is your day. Appreciate all things that you like and try to imbibe them in your life and increase your knowledge every moment to make life grand.