

2. Reshape character by cultivating noble qualities

Among the qualities that make up a flawless character, love, patience, forbearance, steadfastness, and charity are the highest and have to be revered.

The hundred little deeds that we indulge in every day harden into habits; these habits shape the intelligence and mould our outlook and life. All that we weave in our imagination, seek in our ideals, and yearn in our aspirations leave an indelible imprint on the mind. Distorted by these, we form our knowledge, our picture of the world around us, and it is to this picture that we get attached.

One's present is but the result of one's past and the habits formed during that long period. But whatever the nature of the character that one has come by, it can certainly be modified by changing the accustomed process of thought and imagination.

The wickedness of nobody is incorrigible. Wasn't Angulimala, the robber, turned into a kindhearted person by the Buddha? Didn't the thief Rathnakara become Valmiki, the sage? By conscious effort, habits can be changed and character refined. People always have within them, within their reach, the capacity to challenge their evil propensities and to change their evil habits. By selfless service, renunciation, devotion, prayer, and ratiocination, the old habits that bind people to earth can be discarded and new habits that take them along the divine path can be instilled into their lives.

The purpose of all spiritual literature, poems, epics, books, and periodicals is to discuss the nature of this character, its ways and vagaries, and to inform about the process of reshaping it. The *Sanathana Sarathi* has just this aim in view; it does not seek either the exhibition of erudition or the acquisition of name and fame.

But it has to be said that the mere reading of a book or journal will not vouchsafe discrimination (*viveka*). That which is seen, heard, or read must be put into practice in actual life. Without this, reading is mere waste of time. If anything is read to pass the time, it passes the time and nothing remains.