

February 16, 2006

Three questions

CONFLICT & RIGHTS



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A graceful story of the renowned Russian moral philosopher, Leo Tolstoy, concerns an emperor who felt uncertain about the right way to do things in his state business. One day it occurred to him that if he only knew the answers to the three questions that he had, he would never stray in any matter. His questions were - What is the best time to do a thing? Who are the most important people to work with? What is the most important thing to do at all time?

Failing to find out satisfactory answers from his councilors, the emperor decides to go to a hermit who then answers his questions, ending this popular story with a deeply spiritual heft touching the heart. Says the hermit - "remember that there is only one important time and [that is] Now. The present moment is the only time over which we have dominion.

The most important person is always the person with whom you are, who is right before you, for who knows if you will have dealings with any other person in the future. The most important pursuit is making that person, the one standing at your side, happy, for that alone is the pursuit of life."

Well, it is just a fluke, but the counseling of the hermit is still instantaneously helpful to disentangle the problems of King Gyanendra who created many questions on his personality, power and the fight against the ongoing insurgency by doing things apparently provocative and

has made the monarchy vulnerable, and transferred the Maoist rebellion into angst. The king certainly deserved credible strategies and democratic way out. Although these comments appear to have affected only the king, as a person, they have widespread impact on the nation state, which is clear to all nationalist people, but not the king.

A person who has tremendous courage and willingness to do something great needs to be not only big, warm and cuddly, but also sincere, futuristic and accommodative. By doing strange things, and often without a required level of planning and performance strategies, the king has now given a new excuse to the Maoists to intensify violence to pursue their republican agenda, and a cause to the seven political parties, who are annoyed to see themselves neglected.

There is absolutely no logic in what the Maoists are doing. Their totalitarian character and the creed of violence (further confirmed by killing of unarmed electoral candidates and terrorization of innocent voters, who wanted to exercise their right to vote in elections last week) fall far short of their avowed commitment to plural society, and a democratic regime. If violence is the methodology of revolution, then every criminal can do it. But even if violent movements succeed in defeating one tyrant (English puritans and Cromwell in 1649; Russian communists and Lenin in 1917-1921; Ho Chi Minh in 1953 and 1975; in another way, even American arms vs Saddam Hussain in 2003, etc), they cannot give an alternative regime capable of sustaining democracy.

The nationalist forces in Nepal and many of its well-wishers want the institution of monarchy to work together with the political parties, and

path of violence, accept the discipline of multi-party democracy and work for a political settlement that contributes to political stability and economic prosperity. The recent interviews attributed to Prachanda, the Maoist chief, were right efforts to move the armed rebellion politically. But such irresponsible remarks addressed to the king like "accept exile or face the trial" the very next week can serve the external beneficiaries of the Maoist insurgency so well, but does not help Maoists to settle them politically. This is a view full of ironies, of course.

It is too much for the Maoists to feel that they have the political base in the country; and the forces that are backing them up from behind for their own interests can let them be established in power should there be a vacancy for it by chance. This confusion among Maoists is going to cost dearly to this country if those who are deciding things do not stop looking through the tunnel.

B. P. Koirala, the first elected Prime Minister, once recalled how he had complained to King Mahendra about the king's promotion of an anti-government demonstration on the eve of the royal coup of December 1959 and charted a conciliatory nationalist road map for Nepal:

"[The king] kept quiet for a while and then said: "look, it appears both of us cannot be contained in the same place." "... Either permit me to fade out and you run the show as you like. Or you get out and let me rule as I think best. Both of us cannot be at the same place together." Then I said: "Your Majesty, this is a terrible statement you have made. I represent the people, you represent continuity, an institution; and you have a certain political influence ... It is in the interest of the country that

joined hands."

"And because the task of modernization is beset with great difficulties I may humbly suggest, Your Majesty, even you should not be too confident. It would be a frightful boast on the part of Your Majesty that you can run it single-handed, without the cooperation of the people, and modernize Nepal. Of course, I cannot make that claim because it is a gigantic task, a national task which the nation as a whole has to fulfill." And then he got up and said: "Look, if you have any charge against me, do not give vent to that in public. You come here, see me and take off your shoes and beat me ...". I told him that the same thing applied to me. "If I do anything that you consider harmful, you can send for me and do whatever you like. But as the King you should not criticize your government in public."

That was the direction for a stable and prosperous Nepal. Even after 45 years of this conversation, the significance of this approach goes on soaring. This country cannot afford to continue with the present stalemate.

As Tolstoy has hinted in the "Three Questions," to the unknown Russian emperor, the present time is also the most important time for the king of Nepal. By giving its judgment on the constitutionality of the corruption control commission, the Supreme Court has already kicked off a process that can go beyond, if the king starts thinking positively (taking the whole nation on his side).

The most important persons to go along with, in the fulfillment of this gigantic task, are the leaders of the seven parties. There is no doubt that the most important pursuit is to return to democracy by immediately constituting a forward looking national government (taking Maoists on board).