

The Struggle Of Life

These quotations have been selected from the works of Hazrat Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, the founder of the Sufi Order International.



The one who does not know the struggle of life is either an immature soul, or a soul who has risen above the life of this world. The object of a human being in this world is to attain to the perfection of humanity, and therefore it is necessary that man should go through what we call the struggle of life.

Because life means a continual battle, one's success, failure, happiness, or unhappiness mostly depends upon one's knowledge of this battle. Whatever be one's occupation in life, whatever be one's knowledge, if one lacks the knowledge of the battle of life one lacks the most important knowledge of all.

As soon as a man loses the courage to go through the struggle of life, the burden of the whole world falls on his head. But he who goes on struggling through life, he alone makes his way.

One must study the nature of life, one must understand the psychology of this struggle. In order to understand this struggle one must see that there are three sides to it: struggle with oneself, struggle with others, and struggle with circumstances.

One person may be capable of struggling with himself, but that is not sufficient. Another is able to struggle with others, but even that is not sufficient. A third person

may answer the demands of circumstance, but this is not enough either; what is needed is that all three should be studied and learnt, and one must be able to manage the struggle in all three directions.

The one who struggles with himself first is the wisest, for once he has struggled with himself, which is the most difficult struggle, the other struggles will become easy for him.

What is the nature of the struggle with oneself? It has three aspects. The first is to make one's thought, speech, and action answer the demands of one's own ideal, while at the same time giving expression to all the impulses and desires which belong to one's natural being. The next aspect of the struggle with oneself is to fit in with others, with their various ideas and demands. For this a man has to make himself as narrow or as wide as the place that one asks him to fill, which is a delicate matter, difficult for all to comprehend and practise. And the third aspect of the struggle with oneself is to give accommodation to others in one's own life, in one's own heart, large or small as the demand may be.

When we consider the struggle with others there are also three things to think about, of which the first is to control and govern people and activities which happen to be our duty, our responsibility. Another aspect is how to allow ourselves to be used by others in various situations in life; to know to what extent one should allow others to make use of our time, our energy, our work, or our patience, and where to draw the line. And the third aspect is to fit in with the standards and conceptions of different personalities who are at various stages of evolution.

How does the Sufi Struggle? He struggles with power, with understanding, with open eyes, and with patience.

The nature of life is illusive. Under a gain a loss is hidden; under a loss a gain is hidden; and living in this life of illusion it is very difficult for man to realize what is really good for him. Even with a wise person, much of his wisdom is demanded by life and by its battle. One cannot be gentle enough, one cannot be sufficiently kind; the more one gives to life, the more life asks of one. There again is a battle.

The worldly struggle is outward struggle. The struggle on the spiritual path is inward struggle. No sooner does one take the spiritual direction than the first enemy one meets is one's own self. What does the self do? It is most mischievous. When one says one wants to fight it, it says, 'I am yourself. Do you want to fight me?' And when it brings failure, it is clever enough to put the blame on someone else.

The balance of life lies in being as fine as a thread and as strong as a steel wire. If one does not show endurance and strength to withstand all the opposing and disturbing influences among which one always has to be in life, one certainly reveals a weakness and lack of development.

Every circumstance, favourable or unfavourable, in which a man finds himself, and every person, agreeable or disagreeable, in whose presence he is, causes him to react. Upon this reaction depends the man's happiness and his spiritual progress. If he has control over this reaction, it means that he is progressing; if he has

no control over it, it shows that he is going backward.

When a person progresses towards spirituality he must bear in mind that together with his spiritual progress he must strengthen himself against disturbing influences. If not, he should know that however much he desires to make progress he will be pulled back against his will by conditions, by circumstances.

All such things as passion and anger and irritation one looks upon as very bad, as evil; but if that evil were kept in hand it could be used for a good purpose, because it is a power, it is an energy. In other words evil, properly used, becomes a virtue; and virtue wrongly used becomes an evil. For instance, when a person is in a rage, or when he really feels like being angry, if he controls that thought and does not express it in words, that gives him great power. Otherwise the expression has a bad effect upon his nerves. His control of it has given him an extra strength which will remain with him. A person who has anger and control is to be preferred to the person who has got neither.

The only difference between spiritual attainment and the continual struggle of life is that in worldly life one struggles in another direction. In worldly life, be it in business or politics or industry or whatever be life's path, if a person proves to be lacking in that power which enables him to struggle along, he meets nothing but failure. He may be a good person, a saintly person, a spiritual person, but that does not count. It is for this reason that many in the world lose faith in goodness and in spirituality, when they see that this goodness does not seem to count in life. It is absurd for a spiritual person to say that by spirituality, goodness, and piety one's worldly struggle will be helped. One should have the inspiration and power to answer life's demands in life's struggle. The seeker on the spiritual path should not forget that floating in the air is no good; standing on the earth is the first thing necessary.

The point is to meet one's condition with understanding and with complete resignation. Thus the first thing is to meet the condition as it is and the second is to better the condition. The more one can avoid conflict the better; at the same time we cannot always avoid a conflict, and we must not turn our back on it if it comes to us. After all, life is a struggle and we must be ready to struggle. Only, struggle must not make us drunk so that we lose the way of peace which is the first thing to consider.

The only way to live in the midst of inharmonious influences is to strengthen the will power and endure all things, yet keeping fineness of character and nobility of manner, together with an everlasting heart full of love.

The end and the sum total of all mysticism, philosophy, and meditation, of everything one learns and develops, is to be a better servant to humanity. Everything from the beginning to the end in the spiritual path is a training to be able to serve mankind better, and if one does not do it with that intention, one will find in the end that one has accomplished nothing.

In this continual battle of life the one who stands firm through it all comes out of it victorious in the end. Even with all power

and understanding, if one gives up through lack of hope and courage, one has failed. What brings bad luck in this life, in this battle, is a pessimistic attitude; and what helps man to conquer in the battle of life, however difficult, is an optimistic attitude.

In this battle drill is necessary. And that drill is the control over one's physical organs and over the faculties of mind. For if one is not prepared for this battle, however courageous and optimistic one may be, one cannot succeed. Another thing is to know something about this warfare; to know when to retreat and when to advance. If one does not know how to retreat and wishes always to advance, one will continually be in danger and become a victim of life's battle.

There are times when one must give in; there are times when one must relax things somewhat; and there are times when one must hold fast the reins of life. There are moments when one must be persistent, and there are moments when one must be easy.

Life is such an intoxication that although everybody thinks that he is working in his own interest, hardly one among thousands is really doing so. And the reason is that people become so absorbed in what they are trying to get that they become intoxicated by it, and they lose the track that leads to real success. Very often people, in order to get one particular benefit, sacrifice many other benefits because they do not think of them. The thing to do is to look all around, not only in one direction. It is easy to be powerful, it is easy to be good, but it is difficult to be wise — and it is the wise who are truly victorious in life.

In this battle a battery is needed. And that battery is the power of will. In this battle of life arms are needed. And these arms are the thoughts and actions which work psychologically towards success. For instance a person says to himself every morning, 'Everybody is against me, nobody likes me, everything is wrong, everywhere is injustice, all is failure for me, there is no hope.' When he goes out he takes that influence with him. Before he arrives anywhere, at his business, profession, or whatever he does, he has sent his influence before him, and he meets with all wrongs and all failure; nothing seems worthwhile, there is coldness everywhere. And there is another person who knows what human nature is, who knows that one has to meet with selfishness and ill consideration everywhere. But what does he think of it all? He thinks it is like a lot of drunken people. He thinks they are all falling upon each other, fighting each other, offending each other; and naturally a sober person who is thoughtful will not trouble

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with those who are drunk. He will help them, but he will not take seriously what they say or do. In this world of drunkenness a person who is drunk naturally has to fight more than he who is sober, for the latter will always avoid it. He will tolerate, he will give in, he will understand; for he knows that the others are drunk, and he cannot expect better from them.

The reason for life's battle is often very small when it is looked at in the light of wisdom. This shows that the knowledge of life does not always come by battling. It comes by throwing light upon it. He is not a warrior who becomes impatient immediately, who loses his temper suddenly, who has no control over his impulses, who is ready to give up hope and courage. The true warrior is he who can endure, who has a great capacity for tolerance, who has depth enough in his heart to assimilate all things, whose mind reaches far enough to understand all things, whose very desire is to understand others and to help them understand.

If together with sensitiveness one has not developed one's willpower, it is certainly dangerous...There must be a balance between sensitiveness and will-power. Will-power should enable one to endure all influences, all conditions, all attacks that one meets from morning till night. And sensitiveness should enable one to feel life, to appreciate it, and to live in the beauty of life. It is true that by the cultivation of will-power one sometimes persuades oneself wrongly; there is that danger; but there is danger in everything. There is even danger in being healthy; but that does not mean that one must be ill. One must acquire balance between power and wisdom.

What is most advisable in life is to be sensitive enough to feel life and its beauty and to appreciate it, but at the same time to consider that one's soul is divine, and that all else is foreign to it; that all things that belong to the earth are foreign to one's soul. They should not touch one's soul.

There is no doubt that what we lack most in life is to be tuned with the infinite and to be in rhythm with the infinite; in other words to be in rhythm with the conditions of life and to be in tune with the source of our existence. Our perpetual complaints against all things in life come from our not being in rhythm with the diverse conditions of life that we have to face. And then we think that if these conditions would only change into something that we wish, it would make our Life easier; but that is an inexperienced expectation.

And now the question is how can one become at one with the rhythm of life, in other words with the conditions of life? One's condition of life and one's own desire are generally two conflicting things. If desire gives in to the condition, then the condition gets the upper hand; and if the condition is mastered, then no doubt desire has the upper hand. But the condition is not always master when there is a conflict, a struggle; only one needs caution in fighting a condition in life. If harmony can be established peacefully it is better to avoid battling, though it is a fact that those who complain most about life and those who are most disappointed and troubled with life are the ones who struggle most with life's conditions. Therefore in achieving at-one-ment with the conditions of life one need not always use a weapon; one should first try to harmonize with a

particular condition of life.

A condition as bitter as poison will be turned into nectar if we can get into rhythm with that condition, if we can understand it, if we will endure that condition with patience, with courage, with hope. When there is a favourable condition we are very often afraid that it may pass, but when there is an adverse condition we do not generally think that it will pass; we think that it will last for ever. This comes from fear, from agitation, from the desire to get out of this condition, and thus we lose even hope, the only source that keeps us alive.

The best thing is to go through every condition that life presents with patience, with understanding, with open eyes, and so try to rise above it with every little effort we can make.

Tuning ourselves to the infinite is achieved by the way of silence, by the way of meditation, by the way of thinking of something which is beyond and above all things of this mortal world; by giving some moments of our life to the thought of getting in tune with that which is the source and goal of all of us, realizing that in that source alone is the secret of our happiness and peace.

The nature of being in tune with the infinite is this: comparing our soul to a string of an instrument, it is tied at both ends; one is the infinite, and the other is the finite. When a person is conscious all the time of the finite then he is tuned to the finite, while the one who is conscious of the infinite is tuned to the infinite. Being in tune with the former makes us limited, weak, hopeless, and powerless; but by being in tune with the latter we obtain the power and strength that will pull us through life in whatever adverse conditions may arise.

The work that a Sufi considers to be his sacred task has nothing to do with any particular creed, nor has it to do with any particular religion; it is only this simple thing: to be in rhythm with life's conditions and to be in tune with the infinite. And when one asks how one can arrive at being in accord with life instead of being frightened by life's conditions, the answer is: by meeting it and observing it keenly, and then by trying to harmonize oneself for the time being with that condition, while the next effort is to rise above it if it is an adverse one.

Never expect that the events of life are favourable all through. You will have to make a continual struggle and fight with others, whether you like it or not, whether you love them or not. You will find that this fight must be encountered on every side. So you must face it patiently. Do not turn your back to it. Face the conflict with courage and bravery and tranquillity. Since you know that you are on the path of truth you can go on trustfully. Although there is a great responsibility in this worldly life, it is through this responsibility that you are enabled to evolve spiritually. In fact your evolution will become much greater even than that of the saints who have renounced the world. The reason for this is that, when you pursue your life's journey steadily and with tranquillity through all the struggles and conflicts you have to undergo, success will surely come in time. This success will perhaps enable you in your turn to bring great success to the lives of many other souls too.