

What's love got to do with it? it's Money, Fame and Power stupid

When asked what advice she'd give to her 15-year-old self, the celebrated 83-year-old African American poet, Maya Angelou broached the subject of inspiration. "Find a beautiful piece of art," she said. "If you fall in love with Van Gogh or Matisse or John Oliver Killens, or if you fall in love with the music of Coltrane, the music of Aretha Franklin or the music of Chopin -- find some beautiful art and admire it, and realize that that was created by human beings just like you, no more human, no less. The person may have keener eyesight, a better ear, the person might have a more live body and can dance, but the person cannot be more human than you," she advised.

By their own admission, most of the celebrated artists of our times have apparently been inspired into creativity by nothing more than the idea of creativity itself, the thrill of being alive, being human, being able to create.

Bah Humbug!

Realistically speaking, only a philanthropic soul of God-like proportions could be inspired by just the abstract love of creating. When one works, whatever our work may be, it is certainly swell when one is lifted into a creative oblivion. But it's also natural to want something a little more concrete. It's only human to want to be recognized, or even get returns on what one considers to be a lucrative investment of time. Case

in point, the prolific Vincent Van Gogh whose great works didn't bring him either money or fame. He died a miserable and lonely death, with not a soul around to mourn the demise of this bastion of creativity. Fame and money came in post-humously. Even the power that he possibly derived from his creations never translated into anything concrete. And needless to say, the ghost of the now vindicated Mr Van Gogh must be mighty peeved that his fortunes didn't turn during his corporeal lifetime.

From an average man's point of view, there are only three things that can "inspire" him to work. **Money, fame and power** are the three vertices of this triangle. When we start out in our careers, we usually covet all three, but as time passes and reality kicks in, one learns to prioritize between the three. Some of us spend our entire life chasing just one of the three vertices, while others seek different vertices during different points in their lives.

Money

"Man stagnates without ambition" – James T Kirk, Captain of the Star Trek Enterprise

In *The Power of Money*, Karl Marx states, "Only through developed industry – i.e., through the medium of private property – does the ontological essence of human passion come into being, in its totality as well as in its humanity; the science of man is therefore itself a product of man's own practical activity." In the words of a commoner, this

essentially means that owning money is one of the parameters that man uses to define himself.

However, it is a sad reality that society believes the rich to be the villains. Who can forget the Beatles hit song, *Baby you're a rich man*, in which the lads croon – “You keep all your money in a big brown bag inside a zoo/ what a thing to do.” Historically, haven't the rich always been the villains? Hoarding up all of their money which is *surely* ill-begotten, not sparing a thought to nor sharing a penny with those in need. Truth be told, we're all a little anti-authoritarian. And face it, when a man has money, he also has a fair amount of authority. The movie industry has told many a story about big-hearted peasants/honourable paupers languishing under the tyrannical regime of the rich, moustachioed Mr Moneybags. Historically too, we have always rooted for the humble when he revolted against the rich and powerful. Our history and our sociology have unfortunately programmed us to dislike the rich. And if our secret life goal is to amass a great fortune, our common sense tells us to hold this “greedy” secret close to our chest.

But do we really have the right to make such sweeping generalizations against an entire class of people? For every negative movie representation of a gluttonous corporate honcho/maniacal businessman, there have been more than a few real life examples of the rich who don't act too, well, **rich**. The most famous contemporary example of such an

atypical rich guy is Bill Gates. He dropped out of university, made his millions, and now runs one of the world's most famous philanthropic organizations – The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. It is the largest transparently-run charitable organization in the world. In 2007, Bill and his wife Melinda were deemed the most generous philanthropists in USA, having contributed over \$28 billion to charity. Their hard work has made a significant impact in the world of healthcare. In 2005, the foundation donated \$750 million to The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations. They have also contributed for HIV research and the treatment of Tuberculosis. Bill and Melinda have toiled tirelessly for the purpose of education as well.

Gates isn't the first of his kind. Way back in the 19th Century, entrepreneur and millionaire Johns Hopkins, donated a significant part of his fortune to charity. His efforts resulted in the creation of libraries, schools, wider roads and hospitals. John Hopkins was challenging the issues of racism even before it became a legitimate "issue". On his bequest, the Johns Hopkins Coloured Children Orphan Asylum opened its doors to the public. He also founded the now prolific Johns Hopkins University, which is the widely regarded to have the best medical school in the world.

So much for the rich guy being the bad guy, right?

Fame

“If you come to fame not understanding who you are, it will define who you are” - Oprah Winfrey.

The logic about fame is much the same as the logic about money. We tend to resent the famous folks. A famous person is defined as one having a great public estimation; reputation. On the face of it, they live the kind of lives that we all want to. How thrilling it could be if we walked down the road and everyone knew our name, we think. In the simplest possible terms, aren't we all just a little bit jealous of famous people? And it's hard to think too well of people whom we're envious of. Shakespeare's proverbial green-eyed monster has a tremendous negative impact on the way we view people who are more famous than we are.

Our tabloids and glossies bombard us with trite “news” about celebrities. Such-an-such film star prefers boiled eggs over fried eggs; so-and-so international musician likes to sleep with socks on his hands. It makes your blood boil that not only do these people have such glam lives, but also that the whole world worships them for it.

Nobody wants to know the mundane details of your life, so why do they care about the famous people? To assuage our own wounded egos, we choose to paint all famous people with the same brush. “Oh, their extravagance is gaudy,” we think. “They are wastrels who cannot see beyond their own vanity. They lead debauch lives.”

There must be a reason why every actor/actress interviewed always insists that they had never even **dreamt** of being an actor. That fame and marvellously good fortune struck them like a bolt from the blue. That they never worked towards becoming famous. That celebrity-dom just fell on their lap. The reason is that to admit your dreams of fame just isn't acceptable. People would undoubtedly judge you and consider you vain. After all, your dream is to do more than just "get by", and like frogs in a well, members of society consider it their duty to drag down those who dare to dream big.

If your dream is to be famous. Embrace it. If you know that you want to be "known", it's important to know yourself first. And the first step to knowing yourself is to embrace, accept and love your fame-dream. And if your fame goes on to be inspirational to the rest of the world, that is the best kind of fame there is.

Take the case of Alfred Bernhard Nobel, a Swedish innovator who changed the face of the world (and warfare) when he invented dynamite. The high-value that the army placed on his innovation ensured him prestige and great wealth. He had the dream life.

Things changed when a French newspaper once erroneously published Mr Nobel's obituary. It referred to Nobel as the "merchant of death". Alarmed by his notoriety, saddened by his legacy and concerned about how he would be

remembered, Mr Nobel decided to fix things. He wanted to ensure that his name and his work would be fondly remembered throughout time

In his will, Mr Nobel set the bulk of his estate aside to establish what would be known as the Nobel Prize. A coveted-prize awarded annually to those who made landmark contributions to humanity. Today, authors, leaders, scientists and other exalted folk strive tirelessly in pursuit of this high honour. Mr Nobel's legacy inspires and motivates the intelligentsia to find the best way's to serve humankind.

When he established the prize, Alfred Nobel was undoubtedly very concerned about his reputation. He wanted to be remembered fondly and he wanted his name to be attributed to progress rather than destruction. By creating the prize, Nobel sought the highest, noblest fame. A task at which he has certainly succeeded given the fact that he is more famous for the Nobel Prize than he is for the invention of dynamite. And objectively speaking, is such fame really a bad thing?

Similar instances can be seen in the case of numerous astronomers who, upon discovering a new star, name it after themselves. Their name and work gets immortalized and they achieve never-ending fame in the world of astronomy. But given the amount of dedication, perseverance and hard work that they put into achieving the said fame, can we really

judge them for it? Isn't their fame congruous with the expansion of human knowledge?

Power

"With great power comes great responsibility" - Spiderman

Having dealt with the rich and the famous, we come to those who have dreams of power. Power is defined as a person, group, or nation having great influence or control over others. Such people are universally believed to be the most loathsome. Popular culture is rife with super villains who do the most dastardly things in their quest for power and world-dominance. Leaf through the newspaper and you are likely to be bombarded by stories in which corrupt politicians have hoodwinked the masses in order to gain/retain power. We hate the power seekers to the degree that "power-hungry" is now a bad word. And if society finds out that you're dream is to wield power, you're toast!

In his poem Ozymandias, Percy Bysshe Shelley talks of a king's statue standing tall and proud in the ruins of a deserted kingdom. On the pedestal of a statue is inscribed, "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: / Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" The poem's compelling irony lies in the fact that the arrogant king's statue lies in the midst of ruin and rubble? What work can this Ozymandias boast of? Pride comes before a fall, implies Shelley. This is the typical

understanding of the powerful immortalized through our collective cultural narrative. The powerful are arrogant, they are corrupt, they are unlikeable, and more often than not, they are nothing but hot air.

But all those who seek power are not corrupt. I am of the opinion that Mother Teresa was a very powerful woman. She worked tirelessly all her life in order to establish herself as the last word when it comes to charity in India. In her lifetime, she commanded the respect of philanthropists the world over.

Another case in point is the Dalai Lama who has captured the world's attention, as a consequence of which; he now wields enough power to be considered as something of a threat by the Chinese government. Throughout history, our prophets and religious leaders have sought power. But the power they wielded did not diminish the masses; on the contrary, their power only provided strength, solace and light.

Till date, every country has its own example of men and women who have sought power in order to serve the masses.

One of the best examples of positive power is none other than Mahatma Gandhi. His doctrine of non-violence won the favour and following of fellow-countrymen, and he used his power to fight against the colonial rule in India. He is revered world-over for his clear conscience, and Indians believe him to be the best example of an individual who used his power

to serve others. Arguably, power never corrupted Gandhi's ideals.

Upon consideration, we would all agree with the infamous quote which suggests that power does not corrupt man, but a corrupt man in a position of power corrupts that power.

As long as you aren't a megalomaniacal maniac, where is the shame in seeking power? If you are determined to use your power to do good to society, you're probably the noblest kind of person there is!

Where's the evil?

The purpose of my tirade is not just to exemplify the three biggest motivations known to man, but also to re-iterate the fact that these motivations are universal and nothing to be embarrassed about.

Self-help gurus state that the biggest factor that prevents us from achieving our dreams is when we detest or are resentful of those who have already made it big. If you want to be rich, find a rich role model and love him for what he has accomplished. If you want to be famous, accept that fame is an honourable dream and vow that when you have it, you will accept it with humility. If you want power, don't be daunted by the negative associations with that word and find

instead a determination/cause that will remind you to use your power in a wise and humane manner.

The three universal dreams – money, power and fame, are in no way shameful. But the way in which the unenlightened react to these dreams are the only things that we ought to be ashamed of!