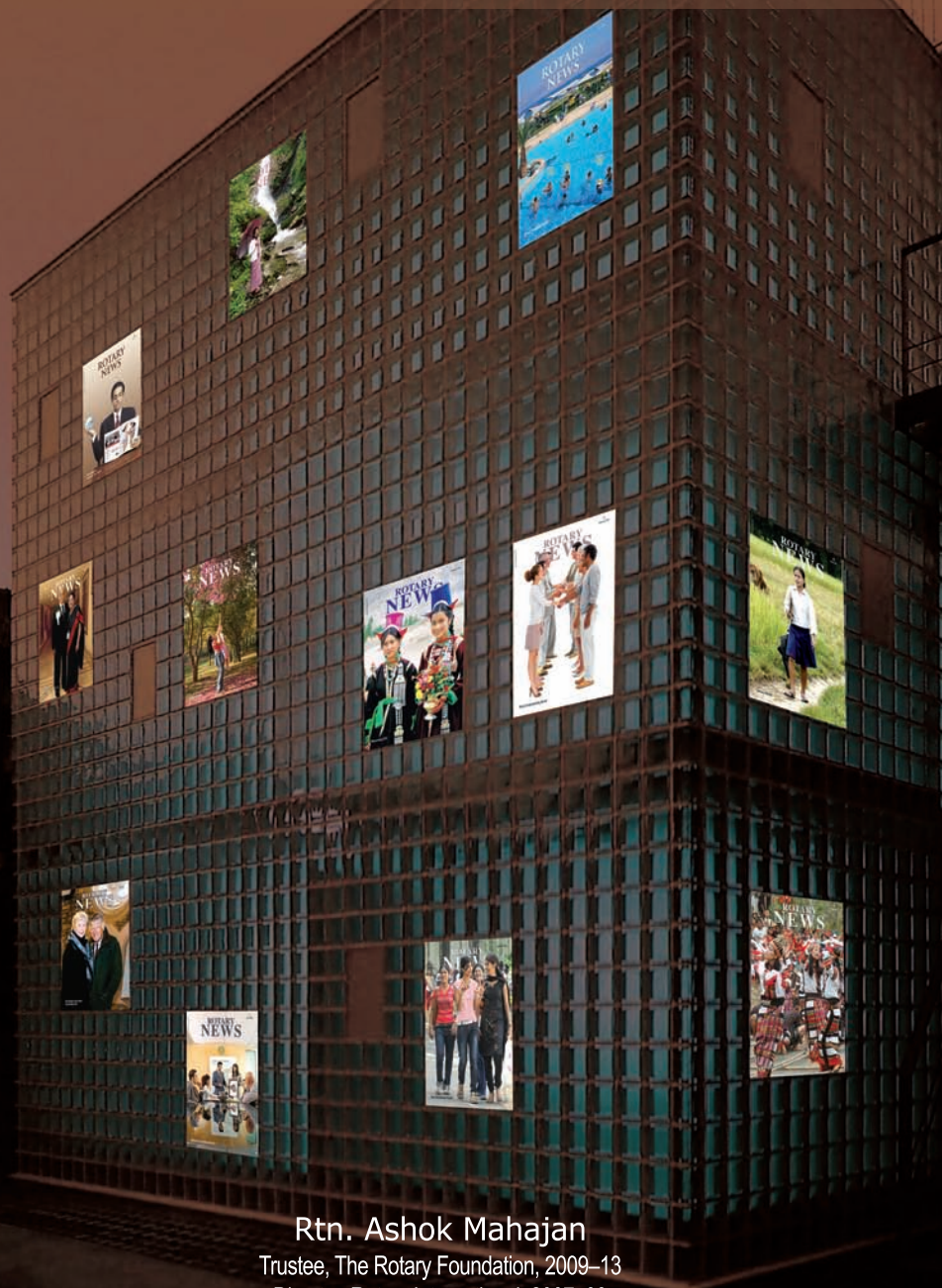


FROM WHERE I AM

A View of Rotary



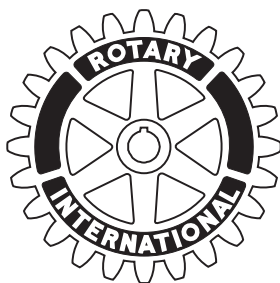
Rtn. Ashok Mahajan

Trustee, The Rotary Foundation, 2009–13

Director, Rotary International, 2007–09

From Where I Am

A View of Rotary



by

Rtn. ASHOK MAHAJAN

Trustee, The Rotary Foundation, 2009–13

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From Where I Am - A View of Rotary

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Foreword

I have known Ashok Mahajan for umpteen years but got to know him well after he became a district governor and more particularly when he joined the crusade against Polio and became member of the Rotary National PolioPlus Committee for India. I have seen him grow just as a tree grows. Today Ashok stands as a mighty tree, spreading his branches far and wide, providing delicious fruits, giving cool shadow and protecting against weather vagaries, and refreshing the air and environment around. His influence and friendship have extended beyond his district or country; his dedication and helpful attitude reflects the comfort he gives to the people who come in touch with him and he has the knack of looking beyond himself, beyond colour, cast or religion to provide the fruit of harmony as we have seen him creating a climate of trust and bringing together the Ulemas to strengthen our fight against Polio.



Ashok, through his journey as Rotary International Director and now as a Trustee of The Rotary Foundation has become a rich reservoir of experience, persuasive practitioner of tact, staunch seeker of good causes and courageous champion of humanity. The tree has truly blossomed.

All said about his superlatives, his talent really gets revealed through the wisdom he underscores in his monthly messages or his writings. It appears that he is ever ready to reflect his knowledge, experiences and philosophy on any Rotary or life related subjects. Whenever Ashok sits down to pen an article or message, perhaps Mother Saraswati, Goddess of Learning as we know in India, not only touches but kisses Ashok's hands, heart and mind. Not that she does not dwell within Ashok all the time but when he takes up writing, his flow, expressions of words and ideas, picking the noble thoughts from all sources, come naturally and incessantly to him.

In Rotary, Ashok has been, and continues to stand on the ground at the grassroots level on one side and also on the senior leadership pedestals on the other. He has developed the ability of perception seen from all levels. This we see in his writings and very aptly he has titled the monthly messages "*From Where I am*" appearing in "*Rotary News*," the regional magazine.

He has come out with the 4th issue of the compendium of his 12 monthly messages for the current year. Having read them I feel refreshed, informed, inspired, sometimes little sleepy but refreshed again. What I admire are his unrelenting zeal, spontaneity to the relevance of the subject and rapid fire to hit the points he aims at. This is how he has dealt with the subjects of this issue. If he is holistic in approach, he is practical too in his submission. If he becomes idealist, he does not lose the virtue of realism. With clarity of mind,

compassion in heart, and totally steeped in the spirit of Rotary he has given some gems for us to collect, understand, value and treasure.

Ashok, born in the family of an executive in a textile unit, educated as an engineer, ventured in the career as an entrepreneur, pursued the path of a businessman, he has now become a writer, a motivator, an intellectual in his own right. May be Rotary had some part to play.

This book has wholesome and wholehearted matter to capture the interest of the reader. Enjoy it.

Rajendra K Saboo

President, Rotary International, 1991–1992

In my Defence

I dedicate all the volumes of my book '*From Where I Am*,' with deep respect and great love to my beloved parents who have made me realise the full meaning of life, to all the Rotarians, my mentors in Rotary and people who have shown me a inspirational path in my life in Rotary. They not only gave me the gift of life but also an unrelenting passion to live it fully for the benefit of others. For that I am very grateful.



I am not some self-styled 'guru.' I'm not. I am just an ordinary person who learnt ideas and tools to help others around me who need help. I had my struggles, my frustrations and even fears. But my fellow Rotarians helped me to have my hopes, goals and dreams. With the guidance of my teachers in Rotary I have made some spectacularly good choices in carrying out the programmes of Rotary International. I learnt to spend my days focused on implementing the wonderful themes given by every President of Rotary International. I dwell on how I can help communities to get help from Rotarians around the world.

The dreamers amongst us are the brave souls who are capable to ignore the voices of the critics while passionately pursuing their highest ideals. Many Rotarians have dreamt of a wonderful world and I have been constantly following their footsteps. They are the great ones. They made me realise that there will never be a better me than me. I understood that there will never be a better time to be the best you than today. My life in Rotary service has been fulfilling.

As I sat down every day to reflect on how to carry forward my work in the community, I also had the opportunity to interact with Rotarians from every part of the world. If what I had experienced and learnt could be useful to someone somewhere, then why not put it down on paper? My thoughts expressed in this volume and the earlier ones is a gift I gave myself. The feelings I have shared with Rotarians reflects the work and the atmosphere I desired to create in Rotary for those who are wanting some sort of guide-book to do great work.

This book has helped me to find ways to connect with people I work with. It has also helped me to share this journey called life with strangers; they were strangers only till the first time I met them. I found that their opinions and ideas not only enriched my views about life but also made me a happier person.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ashok Mahajan'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Ashok Mahajan

Trustee, The Rotary Foundation, 2009–2013

Director, Rotary International, 2007–2009

Smile - Serve - Sacrifice - Satisfy

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Make this planet more peaceful

If Rotary's prime object is to make this world more peaceful, we will need better understanding and more receptive brains to understand "Understanding." We must learn to think of the world not as an aggregation of five continents or a sum of hundreds of countries or nations but as a composite community whose aspirations are common. Aspirations such as hopes, ambitions, peace, prosperity, health and wealth are but a few of the common desires we all have and to achieve our goals we must unlock and open the door to a peaceful tomorrow by the universal key of co-operation and co-effort. No higher service can be performed for mankind than to open the door of peaceful co-existence for universal happiness. The worldwide silken strand of friendship and understanding can weave a net that will retain all that is good and reject negative forces that endanger this world. It is this thread of understanding that binds all Rotarians worldwide, stimulates imagination, awakens deep desires of happiness and fortifies Rotary's resolve to bring peace on the planet.

The ultimate purpose of Rotary is peace and this comes from universal service. A happy society promotes a happier frame of mind and this in turn ensures peace. A "peace-of-mind" leads to peace all around. I remember the teaching of my father who used to visit me when I would lie down to sleep and would softly ask me, "Have you performed a good deed today?" Believe it or not when I said that I had not, he would request me to get up and perform some act of kindness and selfless service before I went to sleep. This has taught me the paramount need to help others. He told me, "No matter what you have achieved, no matter what your bank balance reflects, no matter how many cars are parked in your driveway, the quality of your life will come down to the quality of your contribution."

Please keep in mind that when you work to improve the life of others, you indirectly elevate your own life. Your game plan to improve the life of others must invariably include all that you can do to remove misunderstandings and thus promote peace. The sanctity and sacredness of service, which you render every day, must embrace all that you can contribute to improve impersonal relations with all those who may be miles away but are with you in cherishing peace.

Peace is elusive, no doubt, but not that illusive that it defies solution or depresses the intellect. Unless one step is taken today towards peace, we cannot reach the goal and that one step today will motivate all of us to take more steps, longer steps, stronger steps, purposeful steps, effective steps and result-oriented steps to bring our dreams to reality. Let us begin today. The road is steep, difficult, full of hurdles and even uncharted but that should not deter our determination to make this planet a more peaceful place to grow in and live in.

The Rotary Foundation depends on Members

The Rotary Foundation has evoked such massive responses towards financial commitments that we never dreamt of hundreds of millions of dollars coming from Rotarians to promote the objectives of The Rotary Foundation.

True, most of the contributions come from Rotarians who have seen and experienced the mega service activities promoted by The Rotary Foundation. Let us, however, realise that new members in Rotary need to be exposed to a “promotion drive” so that they understand the gigantic need of the communities and the gigantic assistance offered by The Rotary Foundation. Once the new members are convinced of the need to support The Rotary Foundation, they will always be ready to help.

Membership Growth promotes the concept of new hands, new brains, new commitments and new faiths. Once Rotary grows in number, it will also grow in contributions, commitment and compassion. It is the duty of the Club leadership to expose new members to the arena of Service and the battleground where Rotary “fights” for Peace.

The Rotary Foundation received handsome contributions from Rotarians and their contacts. When Membership Growth is ensured, we can expect better contributions. Let each Club leader make it a point to educate new entrants on the panorama of service rendered by The Rotary Foundation and expose these Rotarians to various programmes of The Rotary Foundation such as GSE, Scholarships, Grants etc. Once they see for themselves what The Rotary Foundation means, they will be willing to be a part of volunteers who contribute and maintain the health of The Rotary Foundation. The vital nutrients needed for The Rotary Foundation to grow are all available with Rotarians. Motivate them to supply these nutrients. The Rotary Foundation is sure to grow even if a few don’t support it. Let us, therefore, be a positive factor and not a “minus” factor in our commitment to The Rotary Foundation.

Service is the Key to Happiness

Rotary has come a long way. It has just celebrated its centenary. With its over 1.2 million members worldwide, Rotary can claim that it is one of the biggest non-profit service organisations in the world.

I am often bugged by the question, “what is it that really draws people to Rotary and motivates them to sacrifice so much of their time, money and efforts in rendering selfless service to the communities at large without ever hoping to get any benefit in return? Are they crazy?” I tell you they are not.

Looking from the outside, Rotarians appear to be a special breed of earthlings. Often the public do wonder what makes Rotarians do what they do? Sometimes, for Rotary’s sake, certain Rotarians are so altruistic that they even set aside their domestic problems and proceed to render help to the needy, marginalised and handicapped.

Such circumstances tell me one thing; that is, if it were money that Rotarians ever hope to gain by joining Rotary, then they, including me are mistaken. Yet looking across the country there are some dedicated souls who are virtually married to the movement as their spouses can testify and invariably complain about. These dedicated Rotarians often place Rotary above their personal selves and considerations. How do we explain this paradoxical phenomenon?

After introspecting for many years, I realise that Rotary provides an effective opportunity and platform for people of means and attributes to unlock and fortify their spirituality by rendering good deeds to their fellowmen.

Money does not buy real happiness although it is essential for daily sustenance and satisfying the basic needs of life. Many people who are rich or wealthy may not necessarily be happy people because there is so much of innate goodness being locked inside the repository of their hearts. This locked treasure needs breathing space for display and that is where Rotary comes in to provide that space for such personalities.

Many sages in the past have taught us to help the poor, the sick and the handicapped. Feed and love our neighbours, look beyond yourself, for it is in caring and sharing what we have with them that brings real happiness and satisfaction to us. This state of realisation is euphoric. It is the highest form of happiness that is ever known to humankind. Many Rotarians, whom I know, have experienced this profound state of happiness. It is this invisible reward that provides the impetus and driving force for Rotarians to do and continue to do what they are doing.

The key to happiness is not the amount of wealth that you possess. It is the selfless service that we render, the sacrifices that we make and the wealth and resources that we share with our fellowmen that provides us the basis for our existence.

Rotarians therefore, should in their efforts to promote Rotary, appeal to their friends, associates and relatives and inform them about the higher purpose of Rotary and attract them to join their clubs.

Look not what Rotary can do for you; but rather what you can do for Rotary. Remember, '*The Future of Rotary is in Your Hands.*'

Values are Necessary

We live in a society where basic human values are on the decline. Those who hold on to certain values and principles find themselves the odd ones out. The only choice is either to flow with the tide of the majority who do not sufficiently care for morality, or face the consequences of daring to be different. As Alvin H Goeser says, “If he continues to hold fast to the basic values of living taught to him by experience, and clarified for him by the wise men and teachers of the past, man can look forward to a future of unprecedented well-being.”

Values are principles which are held in high esteem by a particular society in which we live. Values strengthen the character of a person. They influence the way we think and guide us to do the right things even in adverse life situations. Adherence to basic human values will give meaning, joy and satisfaction in life. Acceptance and practice of values gives us the freedom to act and to face the consequences of our actions courageously.

Today, more than ever, values are necessary because we are faced with the dark realities of life: corruption, oppression, violence, terrorism, fundamentalism, religious disharmony, etc. At this juncture, values can be strong foundations on the basis of which we will make decisions for the individual as well as the common good. Hence, “a deepened sense of basic values is for us individually and collectively our only guarantee for the future,” says Alvin Goeser.

Rotary propagates that honesty is the beginning point of all ethical behaviour. You can not be ethical without being honest. Business needs ethics, Society needs ethics and without the force of self restraint which ethics wields, both of them would be let loose. Then terrorism strikes, delinquency mounts, violence explodes and crime soars high. There is no safety, no security. People live in constant fear, perpetual anxiety and total insecurity. All this is because of the absence of the magical but simple quality called ethics. The unique contribution of Rotary to the world of thought and practice, therefore, is the recognition of the fact that, “Ethics is the foundation of business, Business is the foundation of Society and Business with ethics is service to Society.”

The second ideal of Rotary is high ethical standards. “Satyameva Jayate” is our country’s motto and “Truth” is Rotary’s motto. At a time where corruption is so widely rampant, it is Rotary’s failure to tame the demon that scares the Rotarians. Dharma, which can re-establish the moral values and spiritual elevation, has to be promoted. If we fail to respond to this question, the demon of destruction gets you.

I urge you to re-dedicate yourself to this ideal of Rotary. I know, we can not climb the mountain quickly, we must go slowly, but climb we must.

I also know it is indeed a difficult task but certainly not impossible. We all know a journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step and it is always better to light a candle than to curse the darkness. There is no other way. There is no standing-still when on the path to Seva. Go ahead friends, go ahead.

Re-dedicate yourself to the ideals of Rotary

We are living today in a very crucial age of human history. After millions of years of evolution, man has finally reached a critical period. Science and technology have tremendous power — power that can be used for good or evil — power that can be used with compassion and wisdom. We can abolish poverty, diseases, illiteracy, unemployment and many other ills. At the same time, this very science has given power that can destroy.

Rotary's entry into the second century of its existence has great responsibilities, challenges and opportunities. Rotary's ideals can help the world become a better, a safer and an enjoyable existence. Rotary's ideals are not new. They were not born on 23rd February, 1905 or thereafter. They are universal and omnipotent.

The first ideal is fellowship. Rig veda says that mankind must co-operate with each other for the common good. Fellowship promotes not only friendship but tolerance, love and togetherness — the yardstick of service.

The second ideal is high ethical standards. “Satyameva Jayate” is our country's motto and “Truth” is Rotary's motto. At a time where corruption is so widely rampant, it is Rotary's failure to tame the demon that scares Rotarians. Dharma, which can re-establish the moral values and spiritual elevation, has to be promoted. If we fail to respond to this question, the demon of destruction gets you.

The third ideal is service to the community. Our scriptures and religious publications stress on the need to serve. In fact, service is not only our most important ideal, but our ONLY ideal. We must capture the sense of happiness with humility. Please do not forget that we are living so very comfortably in an ocean of poverty and deprivation. We are merely islands in this ocean of poverty. We must never forget the debts we owe to the communities that have been the reason of our affluence. Humility and not condescension is the spirit we need to cultivate. Swami Vivekananda used to say that when we serve the needy, we must thank them for the opportunity given to us to serve them. PRIP Rajendra K Saboo gave us the message “Look Beyond Yourself.” This concept needs to be re-invented.

The fourth ideal of Rotary is of international understanding. PRIP Hirogi Mukasa of Japan gave the theme “Mankind is one.” Our scriptures too promoted “Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam.” For Rotary, our world is the whole world. When you look at a photograph of earth taken from the moon, you see earth as a tiny speck in the vast expanse of the universe - no caste - no creed - no colour - no nations.

These are a few great ideals of Rotary. There is nothing new in these ideals but we may have forgotten the path to service.

Crowning glory - The Rotary Foundation

One of our best-kept secrets is The Rotary Foundation. Even Rotarians of some year's standing in Rotary have very little knowledge of our Foundation. Rotarians recognise TRF as an agency that collects voluntary donations from Rotarians, their families and friends to get a title — Rotary Foundation Sustaining Member (RFSM) — initially at least \$100.00 and \$100 periodically thereafter to reach the figure of \$1000 (Paul Harris Fellow).

The bus doesn't stop here. Multiple Paul Harris Fellows, Major Donors, Benefactors and such reflect the amount contributed. Do these learned people know what's happening because of these contributions? Alas, only a handful is cognizant of the good work done by TRF in the arena of service. The fault lies in the fact that very few are told what these monies will do. In fact, a few decades ago, Rotary Clubs did all the service activities through their members. TRF was only recognised as an agency to promote scholarships to the needy and the qualified. It supported GSE team exchanges. There was very little that was done beyond these boundaries.

Things have changed and changed so much that it is the duty of Rotary Leaders to spread the information all around. PolioPlus programme of Rotary has been our biggest project that no single club or district or zone could implement. It is a global project. More global projects are going to receive the support of TRF. District Designated Funds have promoted hundreds of local projects. Matching Grants, 3 H Grants and other grants have sustained so many projects that Rotary can enter into colossal projects and bring them to completion. Isolated places have improved their communities through the vision of TRF.

TRF has provided a window through which the light of service and understanding passes with ease. TRF has also provided a door through which assistance, service and aid flows with compassion and tenderness as the vehicles of our dreams. TRF is the most generous expression of Rotarian's generosity — a generosity that not only brings benefits, but also brings help and co-operation to solve the problems that affect mankind.

TRF needs to be projected as a colossus of giant proportions which will do all that the Rotarians can dream of doing but cannot do themselves in isolation because the dreams are too voluminous to be realised by individuals. TRF achieves the best that mankind can possibly achieve.

There is no better example of United Service - Dynamic Service - Noble Service - Everlasting Service - Gigantic Service. Let's all be a part of this machinery.

Communal Harmony - Role of Rotary

The oceans of history are made turbulent by the ever rising tides of revenge. In spite of the fact that the law of revenge solves no social problems men continue to follow its disastrous leading. No one can overcome evil with evil. We proclaim our devotion to democracy, talk passionately about peace but we secretly prepare for confrontation and retaliation. Man imposes death sentence on innocent lives in the name of religiosity.

One of the great tragedies of life is that modern men seldom bridge the gulf between practice and profession, between doing and saying. On the one hand we proudly proclaim certain sublime and noble principles, on the other hand we sadly practice the very opposite of those principles. Often our lives are characterised by a high blood pressure of creeds and an anaemia of deeds!

I feel that the age-old eye-for-an-eye philosophy would leave all us blind. We will continue to worship the God of revenge and bow before the altar of retaliation if we fail to fight evil with aggressive love. It is only love and friendship that can conquer hate and enhance life. Those who cried to crucify Jesus of Nazareth were not bad men but rather blind men. Those who silenced Gandhiji were intoxicated with false religiosity. Those who revolted against Copernican revolution or Darwinian theory were misinformed men. Until we are determined to open ourselves to the reality around us and respond in love, the demon of hate and destruction will continue to haunt us.

Communal Harmony is the utopia we are in search of, the Shangri-la that eludes us and yet I strongly believe that it is not as unattainable as Utopia or Shangri-la.

One of the major reasons for disharmony is politics. Communalism is a tool that politicians use for personal gain and this keeps the fire of hatred burning. We must not politicise the community. The only way to achieve harmony in spite of political interference is to build bridges of love and friendship stronger than fires of hatred. Rotary is a true cross section of the aristocracy of a community. Rotary contains leaders of all important vocations and professions. What better vehicle than Rotary can you get to spread the message of love? No religion preaches disharmony. No religion preaches hate and yet under the guise of religion mayhem is created. Rotary's role is clear-cut. As leaders, as respected members of the community, let Rotary spread the message of peace, of love, of co-existence, of harmony and of tolerance. This will take care of another major reason for disharmony — Religion.

Real love and friendship are rare qualities seldom found in human beings. Love is the most durable power and friendship most elusive of all relationships. Time is ripe for us, the respectable sons and daughters of India, whose religiosity is acclaimed all over the world, to widen the horizon of life

by exploring new avenues of friendship. Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs etc., should together hand in hand form a single security wing of love and friendship to guard themselves against the great demon of blind and false religiosity that is determined to disintegrate our mother land — the land we love most.

Your character is your legacy

Every single person leaves a legacy when his/her earthly life is over. Your very existence has an impact on the world whether you intend it or not. Your character tells who you are. It's what you will be remembered for. So, what legacy do you want to leave behind?

Character is your nature, who and what you are made up of inside. It is who and what you are when no one is observing. It is not just the face in the mirror, but the "face behind the face." All of us are born as diamonds in the rough, uncut shape but with the potential of great value. Over the years we chisel our undesirable traits, exposing many facets of our goodness. The brilliant diamond that we are shaping is our character.

In today's world that is overly preoccupied with image, the tendency is to worry too much about our reputation and too little about our character. Reputations will change with our circumstances and can be destroyed in a brief moment, but character is built in a lifetime and is everlasting.

"No artist's work is so high, so noble, so grand, so enduring, so important for all time, as the making of character" writes Charlotte Saunders Cushman. Character is built by how you respond to what happens in your life. The root of it is self-discipline. The boundaries you impose on yourself regarding the way you think and act form the disciplined heart of your character.

Rotary is recognised and applauded mainly because of men and women who are committed members. No major successes are achieved in the field of services without the involvement of Rotarians and the community readily recognises those who have helped them in their hours of need and not by the "clubs " they belong to.

The character of men and women who venture into the field of service is more important than the service they render. The reputation of Rotary is the reputation of the Rotarians and our character will carve out our reputation.

Rotarians must, therefore, build character. Honesty, ethics, sincerity, humility and many such factors contribute to character and reputation. Reputation is what we are and not what we profess to be. You may project yourself as a faithful servant of the needy but the reflection of your claim is seen in the way you conduct yourself — with honesty and ethical behaviour as your weapons.

Reputation is not built in a day. It is the continued involvement with truthful honesty that will create a favourable reputation. Rotarians therefore must strive to be recognised as reliable tools of service and like Ceaser's wife, be above suspicion.

Rotary has survived for more than a century, because it has instilled into its members, the assets of fairplay, character and ethics. We must all strive to promote these ideals first in our own selves and then in others we interact with to build a

force so strong that many centuries will profit from the relentless pursuit of service with clear conscience.

A good character is the best tombstone. It is by this, that the world will remember you when “forget-me-nots” are withered. Therefore, build up your character and live in a way to carve your name on hearts and not on marble!

Five Appendages of Service

Service is the work involving the use of head, heart and hand, for the welfare of others, irrespective of their status, caste or creed. It relieves the economically underprivileged through personal commitment to selfless service. It contributes to the works of development through physical labour.

Service explores the potentials lying dormant in persons through education. Service is concerned about the needs of others. It offers ample opportunities for the development of one's character and personality. Service prompts us to give selflessly without expecting anything in return.

Rotary professes to service and this service can only be effective if it is done with five appendages.

The first appendage is *Silent Service*. Service not by loud proclamation of your work. Do not confound service with noise. A little noise to attract the needy is acceptable, but the main thrust should be on silent service. I hope a day will come when young men and women in Rotary reduce ambitions and promote silent service. The sun, the flowers, the clouds and the air — all serve, but silently.

The second appendage is *Humble Service*. Humbleness comes from understanding that we are being given an opportunity to be of help to someone. A delivery boy came out of a shop, carrying heavy load of parcels stacked on a cart and started towards his destination, which was a house uphill. As he pushed the cart up the slope he felt too tired to accomplish his goal and rested by the roadside when a stranger approached him and helped him push the cart to the destination. When the boy reached the gates of the house, he said "Thank you Sir!" The stranger said "It is unfair for your boss to have given you this odious task" The boy replied "Sir! My boss told me that you will find a kind gentleman to help you if you are too tired" Let this kind gentleman be a Rotarian who is humble enough to assist the needy without any expectations.

The third appendage is *Compassionate Service*. Love for the deprived must be present at all times and expressed frequently. Be a loving giver. The men and women you help are God's creatures and it is more important to love them whilst helping them. As you grow in the spirit of compassionate service, your circle of service will widen.

The fourth appendage is *Sacrificial Service*. Unless you sacrifice something — your time, your money and your other priorities, your service is not complete. Your time and your personal participation are more valuable than your money. Yes, money we need but merely doling out some coins or notes, you are unfaithful to service — unfaithful to God.

The fifth appendage is *Spiritual Service*. I do not mean that prayers or offerings to God mean “spiritual” service. Our souls must be stimulated by the divine thought that we are offering service to humanity as our prayer to God. May service tinkle a bell in our hearts and teach us to walk the path of service and live a life offering sacrifice, service and sympathy.

Vocational Service - The Soul of Rotary

All of us actively practiced vocational service before we became Rotarians, or else we would not be in Rotary. We were selected because our club friends were convinced that we were competent, trustworthy, fair and honest. All we need to do is to maintain the faith our fellow Rotarians have in us by precept.

In fact every Rotarian does vocational service — the soul of Rotary — more than any other service because vocational service is the service we render to the community, to the competitors, to the clients, to the workers, to our colleagues through our business or professions. If we are honest, fair, straightforward and satisfactory helpful to the community, we can be proud to say that we practice vocational service about eight hours daily. Just imagine the genius of Paul Harris when he wrote that each Rotarian is a connecting link between the idealism of Rotary and the idealism of his trade or profession. This link must be fortified. By working hard, by working well, by working honestly, by working without greed, by working for profits without profiteering, by working with a sense of “service” to the community, our simple and immensely difficult duty in vocational service is performed. You, you alone, can do it. If we can take stock of what we did through the day at the end of the day and if we can, without violating the “inner voice,” say with conviction that we behaved as we ought to, we have written a word or even a sentence in the “History of Service.” May be one day, by many such writing by many Rotarians, we can write a paragraph or even a chapter.

This is the most important face of vocational service — the face of individual action.

The other face of vocational service is presented by corporate action — by the efforts of the club members to produce something visible — a project or projects that illustrate our concern for the vocational service. Career-guidance, parents’ guidance, entrepreneur development, healthy employer-employee relations, promotion of vocational skills, recognition of vocational excellence, consumer awareness and guidance are some of the vital areas where Rotarians have been active and have shown exemplary devotion.

There should be no quarrel whether Rotary should promote personal action of Rotarians or promote corporate projects of the club. The quarrel is about as meaningful as that which divided Constantinople as to the sexes of the angels. Let us forget it: we must, as it were, hold both ends of the chain. Individual action and corporate projects are ‘equally’ valid and necessary. The more difficult of the two is individual responsibility and under the guise of doing much under corporate projects, we tend, conveniently — very conveniently — to neglect our personal responsibilities. Therein lies the tragedy. We have to

bear the burden of our responsibilities eight or more hours a day, most days of the week, throughout our life — and we have to bear it ourselves.

Remember that Rotary is judged by the quality and reputation of the men and women in Rotary — and this almost entirely depends on your personal integrity. That is the most invaluable vocational service you can do — maintain integrity.

Impressions of Sincerity

As a Rotarian we should be intensely aware of the importance and value of being sincere in what we project to the people outside. If we preach high ethical standards in the work place to others, we should be sincere in practicing what we preach. Human beings project the kind of personality and attitude they possess all the time when they interact with others. What they project are essentially two things. First, the thoughts that they express and second the inner feelings that they experience and unconsciously project. What a person feels and what he conveys verbally need not be the same always. This shows the lack of sincerity. A CEO of a company may defraud the investors and pretend that it was a business loss. We have seen District Governors and PDGs work for the defeat or victory of their friends even for petty elections such as nominating committees, while pretending that they are neutral. But in all such instances, the lack of sincerity shows too soon and the person who wears the mask of a cow over the face of a tiger is exposed. Rotarians should remember the saying which goes like this, 'You can fool some people for some time, some people all the time but not all the people all the time!'

Sincerity is living what we profess to believe and being true to our word. As we look around ourselves, the scene is alarming. Sincerity seems to be no longer valued. High ethical standards are central to our organisation's philosophy. If we take up the task of setting things right in the community where we live, we have to be sincere in our thought, word and deed. Sincerity in what we speak or do in our lives has a great personal value and has its influence on the society. Persons of integrity and who are perceived to be sincere in their actions towards others find acceptance and command respect. Is this brand of persons becoming rare today? The new generation sees the elders and shape their behaviour. If we project the image of being an insincere parent, the children may grow up to be liars. I am reminded of a story. A man got into a bus with his 6 year old son. He asked the conductor for one full ticket and one half ticket. The conductor looked at the boy and told the father, "You need not buy a ticket for the boy since he looks less than 5 years of age." The father replied, "If I am not sincere and bluff in front of my son, he will grow up to be another liar and I dread to think of the consequences in his later years."

Today, the families are facing a threat of disintegrating because of lack of sincerity between members. This, I would say, is the single biggest cause of broken homes and neglected children. By being sincere, we can preserve the values we treasure.

To Rotarians, I must speak of sincerity in the context of wholeness and completeness. If our organisation must be perceived as a body of people who will walk their talk, then everyone must radiate the quality of sincerity. We have

to be good as a whole. We cannot be good in parts. We have to be courageous enough to see the truth about ourself. We should be willing to admit our weakness and not justify our bad behaviour. We have joined Rotary because we believe in the values of the organisation. We have to imbibe it and show it in every action of ours.

We live in an information age. If our good deeds spread to all parts of the world quickly, just imagine how fast the negative quality of being insincere will spread. So long as we love and serve, so long as we are loved and served by others, I would say, that it is imperative that we are sincere throughout our life.

Integrity is the key to one's character

The 4-Way Test is not just an edict that seems almost impossible to practice. It is an ideal code of conduct and we must strive to reach as close to the ideal as possible. Let us all admit that honesty, truthfulness and fairness is wanted by all. Nobody wants to be cheated or be a victim of dishonesty. If this is what we want, what stops us from getting it? The only thing that stops us from getting it is that we are not giving it.

To have the greatest character trait of all is to have integrity. It means that you can be trusted. It means that you can be counted on to come through in the clinches. It means you are honest in all of your dealings. It means that there is a purity and moral soundness about you as an individual.

Every employer wants to know that he is hiring individuals who are honest. If you cannot be trusted then you will never make it to the top. When others find that you lack integrity, they will not deal with you. You can control the attitudes and actions of others only if they respect you. They respect you when they know you have personal integrity. There is no substitute for integrity. It is the key to one's character and it is essential for success. Integrity, coupled with knowledge and desire, equals success. There is no use of having all the other attributes that make for success if you lack integrity, for sooner or later this 'lack' in your character will bring you to your knees and destroy all chances of 'greater things.'

Many people behave badly and make a mess of their lives because they lack integrity. They raise the hope of others with promises they know they cannot keep. To do this, is inexcusable cruelty and gross dishonesty. The wise person is the one who realises early in life that honesty is the best policy, that he can go far with personal integrity but nowhere without it. The successful person's destiny is determined by the degree of his integrity.

Even if the path to honesty is strewn with hurdles, may I urge you to take a positive step today? If the goals of honesty, ethics and fair play are some thousand steps away, a step today will bring you that much nearer and one day, you may succeed in taking more than a step or two. Do not frivolously neglect The 4-Way Test, as an impossible ideal to be neglected to some hidden corner. It is very much a part of our lives and it is possible — for sure — to be more truthful or honest tomorrow than what we are today.

About the Author



Rtn. Ashok Mahajan

Trustee, The Rotary Foundation, 2009–13

Director, Rotary International, 2007–09

Rtn. Ashok Mulkraj Mahajan, member of Rotary Club of Mulund, RI District 3140, Mumbai, India has been involved in Rotary since 1973 and rose from an ordinary member to the coveted position of RI Director 2007–2009 by his commitment to the Rotary movement. He was the President of RC Mulund in 1982–83 and District Governor, RI District 3140 in 1993–94.

Born on July 23, 1947, he graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering degree from the Bombay University with distinction and then took a Diploma in Operations Management and Business Management from the Bombay University. He now runs an industry for manufacturing electrical and electronic components.

He has been RI President's representative to District Conferences many times and was also appointed as the Zonal Coordinator for Membership Task Force in 1995–96 and again in 1998–99. He was a Member of the World Affairs Committee during 2003–05.

He is associated with the National PolioPlus Committee for over 10 years and now he is a member of the International PolioPlus Committee of RI. He also served as the Zonal coordinator for Avoidable Blindness Task Force during 2000–02 and was a member in the India Presidential PolioPlus Summit 2001–02. He represented RI District 3140 at the 2001 Council on Legislation, Chicago.

Rtn. Ashok Mahajan was conferred with the Distinguished Service Award, Service above Self Award, Regional Service Award for a Polio free world and the Golden Century Award. He is a major donor to TRF, benefactor and a member of the Paul Harris Society.

Rtn. Ashok Mahajan has been inducted as a Trustee of The Rotary Foundation of RI for the period 2009–2013. This assignment has been given to him immediately after he completed his tenure as RI Director in June 2009.

Rtn. Ashok Mahajan's wife Nayantra, his son Nikhil and daughter Namrata ably support him in his work in Rotary and create the perfect atmosphere for the family to celebrate the blessings of life. A deeply religious person, Rtn. Ashok Mahajan enjoys reading, cricket, walking and social service.