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305. LETTER TO NAVIN GANDHI

June 28, 1935

CHI. NAVIN,

I have your letter. I appreciate your keen desire [for studies]. But I am afraid I will not be able to help you much in the matter. However much time I may devote to you I will always consider it as insufficient. It would be like the proverbial recluse who, hankering after this world as well as the next, ruins his prospects in both. So it is better if you join the Vinaya Mandir at Ahmedabad or a high school at Rajkot or Bhavnagar. If I cannot afford to send you to a high school, there is nothing else that I can do to satisfy your craving. If you come to me I shall certainly help you in learning English and Arithmetic thoroughly. But you cannot lay down any conditions with me. The main thing is the work here and anything that has to be done is by way of service. Of course the best course would be to come to me. I too would welcome it but staying with me means learning to serve and making progress in it. Even acquiring knowledge is for the sake of service.

Don't hesitate to write to me. I shall try to guide you if you keep on writing to me.

Blessings from
BAPU

From a copy of the Gujarati: Pyarelal Papers. Courtesy: Pyarelal

306. DUTY OF BREAD LABOUR

Brahma created his people with the duty of sacrifice laid upon them and said: 'By this do you flourish. Let it be the fulfiller of all your desires.' He who eats without performing this sacrifice eats stolen bread.

Thus says the *Gita*. "Earn thy bread by the sweat of thy brow", says the Bible. Sacrifices may be of many kinds. One of them may well be bread labour. If all laboured for their bread and no more, then there would be enough food and enough leisure for all. Then there would be no cry of overpopulation, no disease, and no such misery as we see around.

Such labour will be the highest form of a sacrifice. Men will no doubt do many other things either through their bodies or through their minds, but all this will be labour of love, for the common good. There will then be no rich and no poor, none high and none low, no touchable and no untouchable.

This may be an unattainable ideal. But we need not, therefore, cease to strive for it. Even if without fulfilling the whole law of sacrifice, that is, the law of our being, we performed physical labour enough for our daily bread, we should go a long way towards the ideal.

If we did so, our wants would be minimized, our food would be simple. We should then eat to live, not live to eat. Let anyone who doubts the accuracy of this proposition try to sweat for his bread, he will derive the greatest relish from the productions of his labour, improve his health and discover that many things he took were superfluities.

May not men earn their bread by intellectual labour? No. The needs of the body must be supplied by the body. "Render unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's" perhaps applies here well.

Mere mental, that is, intellectual labour is for the soul and is its own satisfaction. It should never demand payment. In the ideal State, doctors, lawyers and the like will work solely for the benefit of society, not for self. Obedience to the law of bread labour will bring about a silent revolution in the structure of society. Man's triumph will consist in substituting the struggle for existence by the struggle for mutual service. The law of the brute will be replaced by the law of man.

Return to the villages means a definite voluntary recognition of the duty of bread labour and all it connotes. But says the critic, "millions of India's children are today living in the villages and yet they are living a life of semi-starvation". This, alas, is but too true. Fortunately we know that theirs is not voluntary obedience. They would perhaps shirk body labour if they could, and even rush to the nearest city if they could be accommodated in it. Compulsory obedience to a master is a state of slavery, willing obedience to one's father is the glory of sonship. Similarly compulsory obedience to the law of bread labour breeds poverty, disease and discontent. It is a state of slavery. Willing obedience to it must bring contentment and health. And it is health which is real wealth, not pieces of silver and gold. The Village Industries Association is an experiment in willing bread labour.

Harijan, 29-6-1935