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Imperfection Is Bliss; Perfection Is An Illusion

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Abstract: The world is crazy for perfection in every aspect of life, leading to frustration, melancholy, and anguish. Little do we realize that God has created each of us with special, unique features that help us stand out from others. Time and again, we find innumerable examples warning us about the consequences of perfecting ourselves. Still, we set excessively high standards for ourselves and others. We work relentlessly to reach the impossible, perfect ideal. It is advisable to accept our imperfections, choose authenticity over perfection, and live a contented life.

Keywords: Imperfection, illusionary perfection, flaws, wabi sabi, repercussions

Perfection is a relative term.

As human beings, we are often taught to be perfect in almost all aspects of our lives, including manners, education, sports, music, art, and numerous other disciplines. We grow up chasing these illusionary perfections, and in the process, either give up or frustrate ourselves. We take this goal to perfection so seriously that we start working overtime not just to improve ourselves, but also to help others. Everyone is trying to teach others how to become better or perfect, except themselves. Often, our idea of perfection is inspired or derived from someone else, another human being who is imperfect or chasing their imperfection. There is no true universal definition of perfection; it varies from culture to culture, country to country, decade to decade, and era to era. In our rat race to become perfect, we tend to forget that nature has made all of us imperfect and unique. The world would become a boring place for all of us if we were to become perfect. All of us would look the same, behave the same, dress the same, talk to the same, and so on.

I find human imperfection a very beautiful thing. The beauty lies in being imperfect, being different, and being unique in whatever way nature has made us. We are all born unique, but most of us die as a copy of someone else. We focus on perfecting others and ourselves instead of recognizing our true uniqueness and living a happy and contented life. Once we recognize human imperfections and come to know that nobody is perfect, each one of us has unique strengths and weaknesses, and we embark on a journey that is fulfilling, satisfying, and meaningful. One of the underlying causes for the innumerable cases of suicide, drug addiction, alcoholism, sexual assaults, and murders is due to our craze for perfection.

Let us examine imperfections at close quarters, imperfections, and why an individual should accept his shortcomings and work earnestly to build up his strong and positive traits to excel in life. We must first see the creations of God and find out if they are perfect. The Earth is not perfectly round and tilted on its axis, which helps create the seasons we experience. Without these imperfections, our life would not be possible. Galileo Galilei, based on his scientific observations, concluded that the moon is not a perfectly spherical body. The many small spots he observed were mountains and valleys, which appear as shadows to us. So, our satellite has imperfections like the Earth. Waterfalls occur because water (glaciers or landslides) has worn through the crust, carving a path that is harder in some places and softer in others, creating some long meandering rivers and some raging waterfalls. Caves are holes carved out of the crust or simply never-formed crust. Hot springs,

bubbling mud, thermal pools, and geysers happen when the earth's imperfect crust is thinner and magma sweeps close to the surface. Mountains can form from crust wearing away from tectonic plates crashing together in so perfect manner. Wherever we look, nature shows us how beautiful imperfection is. The most gorgeous sunsets are those where the sky isn't clear but is instead dotted with clouds that change colors as the sun sinks over the horizon. Where do you find a perfect tree? They can be undersized, oversized, hollow from the inside, crooked, scarred, etc, but still look beautiful with their imperfections. All animals, flowers, and fauna have their unique imperfections. There is no perfect country or perfect place, politically, culturally, and geographically, yet every place is perfect in its way.

Perfection is a human concept, the limit of a limited mind. When we open a thesaurus and search for the antonyms for "perfect," you'll find words: flawed, corrupt, inferior, poor, second-rate, inept, broken....All negative connotations, no wonder we have become so obsessed with perfection. We sculpt the perfect body, crave for perfect career path, and a perfect partner, we procrastinate until eternity before releasing that imperfect piece of art. There is never a fixed concept of perfection; it keeps changing when there is an inherent imperfection in all of us. How can anything made by us be perfect? American humorist Mark Twain said that the very notion of perfection is continuously getting perfected all the time, so much so that it needs an element of imperfection as a catalyst to grow further. Anything or any person with a slight error or imperfection is admired more by people because we all can relate to imperfections more easily than an imaginary idea of perfection. We live in a world that seeks non-existent perfection. We seek the illusion that makes us change our essence. Imperfection is a form of freedom. Without imperfection, neither you nor I can exist. The Japanese philosophy Wabi-sabi means a way of living that focuses on finding beauty within the imperfections of life and accepting peacefully the natural cycle of growth and decay. There is a plethora of wisdom embedded within this age-old philosophy stating that all things in life, including you, are in an imperfect state of flux, so strive not for perfection but for excellence instead. Richard Powell states three realities of life: nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect. Perfection is fueled by a desire for external approval. It is an indulgence. We are afraid that if we expose our flaws, we will stop getting a daily dose of approval. So we puff ourselves up and create a curated positive portrayal of our imperfect and flawed lives. We round off the edges, air-brush the negatives, and present a perfect image to the public that we carefully nurture and maintain. Perfection is for robots. Human beings come with flaws. When we cover these flaws, we also conceal what makes us human.

Literature is replete with examples depicting the obsession with human perfection. One of the remarkable stories emphasizing the repercussions of perfection is *The Birthmark* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. The narrator describes Georgiana as perfect in every way except for the birthmark on her cheek. It was a small pink hand-shaped and located on Georgiana's left cheek. It becomes less visible when she blushes, but it is more visible when she is pale. Georgiana had many suitors, and they reacted to the birthmark in different ways. Some yearned to kiss it, and some considered it the magical fairy touch at the moment of her birth. Alymer is an intellectual run amok, a man whose mind has overpowered his sense of decency. An incredibly skilled scientist, he has made exciting discoveries about the physical world. Alymer, however, does not hesitate to use his skills to tamper with nature's creations.. He essentially tries to play God, utilizing his scientific skills. Alymer marries Georgiana and loves her immensely, but he cannot stand her birthmark, an aspect of her that falls short of perfection. Alymer becomes so obsessed with making Georgiana perfect that her one supposed imperfection comes to blind him to everything else good about her. He sees it as a manifestation of the fatal flaw of humanity that appears in all beings created by nature, marking them as destined for suffering and death. While other men find ways to look fondly on the birthmark, Alymer ruins his married life by dwelling constantly on the mark and the deeper flaw of the soul that he thinks it represents. Ironically, Alymer's quest for perfection fails just at the moment that he succeeds. In removing the birthmark, he does manage to make Georgiana perfect; however it is it suggests that Georgiana needs to be imperfect to survive on the mortal plane. The moment of birthmark disappears, she becomes perfect; she can no longer exist as a human _human being by Biblical definition, imperfect, so she dies to ascend to the higher plane of existence. Blinded by a meaningless imperfection and an impossible goal, Alymer threw away her life and his chance of happiness in trying to improve his lovely wife; he failed to realize that she had been perfect all along.

Alymer desires nothing more than for Georgiana to lose her birthmark and become perfect, while he is quite imperfect. The account of all his previous experiments shows that he has failed to achieve most of what he aimed to do. Hence, he exhibits hypocrisy, demanding nothing less than perfection from his wife when he is so far from perfect. Alymer's scientific ambition blinds him to the reality of life. Georgiana's death demonstrates

that no being can ever be perfect; only divine beings can attain that goal. Humans must accept their shortfalls and those of others because absolute perfection is impossible, and striving for it will only make them miserable.

Girish Karnad, in his play Hayavadana, has dealt with a similar problem, the desire for perfection. In the play, Padmini gets married to an intelligent man, Devdutt, but she is not satisfied with him; she has only a passing fascination for him. In her heart of hearts, she is keen to have a virile body like that of Kapila, Devdutt's best friend. In a scene hilarious, comic, but at the same time full of connotation, Padmini transposes their heads, giving Devdutt Kapila's body and Kapila Devdutt's as a result, Padmini gets the desired 'Man'. Initially, Devdutt, actually the head of Devdutt, on Kapila's body behaves differently from what he was before, but slowly he changes to his former self, and so does Kapila faster than Devdutt. But there is a difference: Devdutt stops reading texts and does not write poetry, while Kapila is haunted by the memories in Devdutt's body. Padmini, after the exchange of heads, felt that she had the best of both men slowly gets disillusioned. She is disappointed, though she is the only one out of the three who has the capacity for complete experience. She understands but cannot control the circumstances. In this play, Karnad is trying to convey that perfection is a myth and can never lead to happiness.

The unending chaos in the entire world in the form of wars, violence, crime, and conflicts is due to the mad race for perfection. The human race is in a state of turmoil, surrounded by stress, tension, innumerable diseases, broken relationships, emotional detachment, etc, the underlying reason being 'perfection'. The obsession with perfection makes life miserable. Humans must learn to live with imperfection, accept it, and celebrate it rather than eradicate it.

Always remember, without imperfection neither you nor I can exist. So, embrace the imperfection that makes you unique. Don't change to be perfect. You are already perfect in your imperfections.

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