

The Devil is in the details

This common phrase contains an important warning that is too often overlooked, when it comes to implementing new ideas, especially very promising and noble ideas. Also, not many understand its meaning, or are aware of it. Yet it is paramount that we understand and pay heed to it in everything that we undertake, or plan to do.

Let's start by understanding its meaning.

"The devil is in the details" means that small, overlooked things can cause major problems. For example, a party plan can fail because no one has considered a simple thing like the seating arrangement of guests. For example, seating guests who have a history of conflict or a known bad relationship at the same table, or worse, next to each other. This can create significant tension and make the event uncomfortable for everyone nearby. Another example is a social revolution failing because no one has thought through how the new system would work, or the character traits of the champions of the revolution, who would invariably become its new managers. Thus, the phrase highlights that while the big picture may look fine, the tricky problematic aspects (the "devil") hide in the specifics of implementation. And these require careful attention.

Another surprising tidbit about this phrase is that "The devil is in the details" evolved from the earlier phrase "***God is in the detail***". The core idea here being that perfection, which is associated with the Divine, also demands attention to the most minute detail. (This fact is confirmed by studies in the natural sciences, which show the fine delicate, yet powerful balance that exists in nature, where its minutest elements are by design, and not arbitrary or incidental). The change of reference to The Creator (and divine meticulousness in execution of plans), to "The Devil", occurred when Europeans moved away from belief in the spiritual.

Yet, recognizing that the need to pay attention to details still exists, the phrase was transformed to a warning against hidden problems (which is now associated with the "devil"), that still lie in the small things associated with implementing a plan.

This change from reference to The Creator to The Devil, may appear insignificant to many people. But deeper reflection reveals that it has had a much greater impact than meets the eye.

To explain, a leader who is genuinely motivated by building to the honor of The Creator, may overlook an important detail. But because their sincere desire is for selfless service, they are more likely to accept corrective suggestions that are offered to them. And since they are driven by service to the honor of The Creator, their ego is not projected into the implementation, and a conflict is unlikely to arise from what would otherwise be seen as a challenge to their "authority". But a leader who forgets, or overlooks the fact that the deed is being carried out in honor to The

Creator, allows his, or her ego to creep into their service. And they are more likely to see any suggestion or opinion that is contrary to theirs, as a challenge to their “authority”. Worse is when driven by ego, they see the task as an opportunity for personal gain, self-aggrandizement or control of others.

We may not appreciate that this “slight”, but important change of word, surreptitiously removed focus from constantly keeping in mind that all service should be carried out in honor of The Creator, with the requisite attention to the details that bring the outcome to the level of perfection worthy of honoring The Creator (i.e. “God is in the details”). With the removal of this focus, the driving force of actions becomes more susceptible to ego driven selfish motivations, which in turn makes it difficult for partisans, with different ideas on implementation, to put aside their ego-driven differences, even at the cost of derailing the noble idea. History is full of many noble social development ideas, as well as Spiritual movements, that have suffered from this flaw.

Detractors point to these failures, or their drastic deviations from the original noble goals as evidence that the ideas themselves were flawed. However, a closer review of the ideas show irrefutably that their nobility is NOT flawed. For example, what could be flawed in striving for social justice or equity? Or what could be wrong in trying to raise human consciousness towards Spiritual goals, whose attainment would result in enhanced nobility of character of the human being?

It was always the implementation that was flawed. And this could be traced back, either to the character traits of the managers of the new order, or the unpreparedness of the society (i.e. the people) for such a change. The latter is most especially ignored by many revolutionaries. So that even if they themselves were prepared, and able to manage the new order, the human material needed to support them was not developed or matured enough to translate the noble ideas into practical realities.

The same failure can be seen with the major spiritual movements that have arisen on Earth over millennia. Here especially, the tendency has been, and unfortunately still is, to discount or despise any thorough and objective evaluation of the implementation steps. Even though the disastrous consequences of their flawed implementation have a much wider and far-reaching impact on human lives. The more far-reaching effect being how the disappointments of the masses, and the pain they suffered through the actions of ego-driven leaders and structures, cause them, overtime, to abandon the noble ideas upon which they once placed their hopes.

The secular nature and cynicism, today in the Western World for example, can arguably be ascribed to the religious conflicts, persecutions and tortures, promoted by their religious establishments and leaders, and suffered by the masses, resulting in very high death tolls. For example:

- **Thirty Years' War (1618-1648):** - conflict between Catholic and Protestant states, death toll range from **4.5 to 8 million**.

- **French Wars of Religion (1562-1598):** - conflicts between Catholics and Huguenots, estimated **2 to 4 million deaths**.
- **The Crusades (1095-1291):** - an estimated death toll of **1 to 9 million**.
- **Inquisition & Witch Burnings(1400 – 1700s):** - Church sponsored trials, ostensibly to stem heresy and the practice of witchcraft - over 200,000 people killed.

After stripping these conflicts of the rhetoric with which they were cloaked, one can easily see that their driving force was human ambition, greed, material gain, lust for power and even psychopathy. For example, no one today will argue about labelling the leaders and managers of the inquisitions, or the burnings of witches, as Psychopaths, even though they acted in the name of stamping out heresy, or maintaining the faith. Also, any student of history cannot fail to see the raw greed for material wealth, by the church and the European princes and kings who responded to the call to the crusade against the Saracens. Most doing so in hopes of the new lands awaiting their plunder and usurping, with the blessing of the church.

These examples are not mentioned to criticize, but to give us pause to consider how we are today, perpetrating the same flawed implementation of noble ideas, driven by unadmitted ignoble motivations.

Although focus is always directed at the leaders of these disastrous events in history, the role of the majority is seldom examined. Most, as it turns out, are so fixated on the noble goals, that they refuse to admit to the ignoble tactics of leaders, who use spiritual rhetoric to cloak pursuit of their own agenda.

King Henry the 8th of England is a very good example. He suddenly decided, when the Pope refused to annul a marriage that he desired, that the Catholic Church, of which he had been the greatest defender, was impoverishing the people of his country. He then used that as grounds to break away and establish his own church, of which he appointed himself as the head.

To any simple observer, this was an act dictated by a purely selfish and self-centered motive. But many theologians saw an opportunity to promote themselves and their own agenda, and quickly jumped into the fray, propagating theological arguments for or against the act. And to this day, the purely selfish, and non-Spiritual motivation or cause of the rift is seldom given any serious consideration. But this cynical act by the leaders and theologians affected the noble goal of promoting spiritual development and enhancement of the people of the United Kingdom. The result is a populace that became cynical of the activities of the church and theologians, and caused a distancing of many from their faith and religion.

Leaders and supporters, even today, use complex spiritual or faith arguments to confuse and stifle opposition. And when competing ambition-driven factions develop, both sides use all most the same complex spiritual arguments to support opposite goals!!

So, today as in the past, the optimistic acceptance of the faithful are still being dashed by the flawed leaders, whose motivation, when examined, leave much to be desired.

But the followers today also have to admit to their culpability. With their eyes fixated on the noble ideas, they refuse to evaluate the path on which they are being led. Many do this in the mistaken idea that The Lord will ensure that they arrive at the hoped for goal, despite any flaws exhibited by the leaders. Some even refuse to admit that their leader could have flaws, or that they have a duty to say or do something to make the leader change his or her ways. Instead, they look for spiritual reasons, like the theologians, to excuse flawed actions when they admit to it.

Again, many objective observers wonder whether it is fair to expect that the masses are capable of piercing through the spiritual or theological arguments involved in these conflicts, especially when they appear based on the noble ideas.

We posit that the answer is a resounding yes! Anyone can see through the hubris.! And the yardstick for such evaluation is something that a child and the least educated is already familiar with, namely The 10 Commandments, also known as the Golden or the Sacred Rules

Now, let us consider. If all actions were judged simply by how they align with the 10 commandments, which, after all, are the practical guide lines by which we can strive towards nobility of character, wouldn't many of the budding religious conflicts, as well as those mentioned earlier, have been quickly seen for what they were? Wouldn't some of these conflicts have been averted by rejection, by the majority of followers, to participate in what they recognize as ego-driven ventures or stance of the leaders? Also, more would be better able to express what they see or sense as wrong in these venture or stances, without being confused by the complex spiritual arguments made by theologians.

From this, perhaps one can see the Divine wisdom in giving the 10 commandments as prerequisite to the more subtle and higher knowledge contained in later Spiritual Messages. For example, in Jesus' teaching, the successful implementation of which demands an even greater scrutiny of the details involved, using the golden rules as the infallible yardstick for assessing actions.

Also, constant reference to the Golden rules in assessing our actions will keep The Divine always in mind, and the original advice/warning that "*God is in the detail*". That is, ***that perfection, which is associated with the Divine, is demanded in the most minute detail for any task that is being done in honor of The Creator. Therefore, all actions associated with these activities must be evaluated*** with the 10 Commandments, as the starting point, before delving into any spiritual or theological arguments for, or against.

Final Word

Guided by this, every sincere person should more easily detect wherever selfishness, egotism and other human flaws threaten to infect the successful implementation of any plan. This will be done without being confused by the spiritual arguments used to justify or mask flawed actions.

Also, when this becomes the focus of attention, leaders will be deprived of their tactics of using spiritual arguments to deflect from themselves, and from using the same, or other clever ruse, to label objectors as trouble makers or rebels, to be banned or excommunicated, if not burned at the stake of public opinion. Meanwhile, the majority who are fixated on the noble goal, do not see how far off they may be veering from the goal under the flawed leadership, to which the objectors are trying desperately to draw their attention.

In the end, the followers inevitably have experiences that lead many to a deep crisis of faith, which can drive many to abandon the noble goal that they once cherished. ***But the loss becomes theirs.*** A loss that could have been avoided if the misdirection of the leader(s) had been rejected and corrected in time, to keep the group on the path leading to the noble goal.

No doubt, the state of apathy and moral decline in today's secular societies can easily be seen as the result of loss of faith in the noble goals they once cherished. But many still fail to appreciate that this was due to their own inattention to details, and in not circumscribing the unlimited power that they voluntarily yielded to leaders who, as all humans, are prone to have flaws.

In closing, it should be stated that the organization is not necessarily the problem. Any group activity by humans invariably demands a formal or informal organization to carry out the activity. The problem arises when the members of the group allow autocratic management or leadership to gain control, using theological or spiritual arguments that are high sounding distortions of the beautiful tenets of the teachings that members hold very dear.