

Interaction on
“The Difficulty of Being Good: On the Subtle Art of Dharma”
with
Gurcharan Das
11th February 2011, Kolkata



Mr. Gurcharan Das, noted author (Left) and Mr. Pradip Chopra, Chairman, ILEAD (Right)

Celebrated author and a management guru, Gurcharan Das was in Kolkata on the 11 February to talk about his new book, “The Difficulty of being Good: On the Subtle Art of Dharma”. This event was organized by Aspen Institute India at the Oberoi Grand and well attended by about people from all walks of life including industrialists, management professionals, publishers, Consulates, and also students.

“How can we live with moral balance in an arbitrary and uncertain world?”

The concept of being “good” in society was illustrated skillfully by Gurcharan Das, as he drew analogies from the timeless epic Mahabharata. He explained that there was a “private” version of the Epic and also a “public” side, which in turn we should explore. He explored the context and lessons that a pre modern text like Mahabharata had for the contemporary world we live in.

“The Difficulty of being Good” is a thought provoking book that brings out the dharmic challenges we face everyday. The Ramayana is the ideal but the Mahabharata is for the real society we live in. “ The Mahabharata is about our incomplete lives, about good people acting badly, about how difficult it is to be good in this world.” The Mahabharata is also unique in engaging with the world of politics.

“Why be good?”

Most of us spend our lives wrestling with day-to-day questions of right and wrong and these are either unanswered or have no easy answer. We live in a state of “moral confusion”. The author focused on dilemmas such as these in his book and dwelled on the goal of dharma, moral well being. He talked about the Ambani family saga raising troubling moral questions. The Author’s take on how the substance of the Mahabharata could be used to better manage our lives invoked some serious reflection.



“A tale for time of crisis”

The recent global economic crisis has revealed deep corruption and lack of moral insight at the highest echelons of society – revealing all the more the “difficulty of being good”. The characters in the Mahabharata in turn exemplify this constant moral struggle. During this session Gurcharan Das engaged the participants in a lovely discussion which ranged from the recent scams in Indian society to the economic upheaval in the

world starting from 2008. The audience in turn asked provocative questions including dilemmas of judging a terrorist as he may be someone else’s martyr.

“The word ‘dharma’ is as complex as it is ubiquitous”

The author explained that he had good reasons for the subtitle, for dharma is indeed a ‘subtle art’, not a commandment cast in stone. Through real life examples Gurcharan Das painted a clear image of the evolving nature of goodness ultimately stating that the Mahabharata will always continue the dialogue on ethics and morality, drawing connections to moral dilemmas in contemporary life.



The session was chaired by Mr. Pradip Chopra, Chairman, ILEAD Institute and Managing Director PS Group who noted that questions raised in books such as the one written by Mr. Das are exactly what are needed to provoke leaders of this country.

**February 11th, 2011
Kolkata**