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The heart of Lanka is living, not dead

I climbed over the crags of Lanka
 And gazed on her golden sea
 And out from her ancient places
 Her soul came forth to me
 "Give me a Bard," said Lanka,
 "My bard of the things to be
 My cities are laid in ruins
 Their courts through the jungle spread
 My sceptre is long departed
 And the stranger lords instead,
 yet give me a Bard," said Lanka
 I'm living, I am not dead"

This verse from Rev. W.S. Senior's immortal and awesome "Call of Lanka" would serve as the centrepiece of a message of hope and reassurance as a confused, if not chaotic Sri Lanka celebrates the 56th anniversary of its independence.

Whatever is happening or not happening, whatever the high waters, the droughts or the hell-fires; a significant day such as this needs to be seen in terms of positives and possibles and even achieving what seems to be impossible. We need to be renewed today by the momentous call to climb every mountain, search every sea and follow every rainbow until we find the dream of unity in diversity and a society where there is a more equitable distribution of wealth and resources.

To turn around and move towards those noble goals and visions, we need first to turn the searchlight inwards and be honest and humble in acknowledging that we all have been part of the crisis. We need to admit that we all have contributed towards the mess and the muddle of what we have done or said or what we failed to do and say. We all need to enter into a spirit of being accountable and taking responsibility, though the degrees may differ. We need to be conscious, especially today, that part of the cultural pollution of our society is the blame culture - our tendency to blame others, events and situations for the conflicts and struggles we face. We need to be aware that blaming others or events and making them scapegoats is more a part of some ego mania than reality. The humble spirit of taking responsibility and being accountable individually and collectively would carry us to the next step of becoming part of the solution instead of being

part of the problem, being part of a renewed hope rather than hopelessness, part of the process of rebuilding trust and confidence rather than being embroiled within division and destruction. To be part of the solution, every Sri Lankan of whatever religion or race would need to think positively and focus on the blessings rather than negatively focus on the problems and conflicts. Positive thinking is often associated with the quality and attitude of being proactive as opposed to being reactive. Mahatma Gandhi stands as a supreme and spectacular example of a proactive personality in the mainstream of public life. He did not react angrily or violently as people do so often in politics, in society and tragically even in religion today. Instead Mahatma Gandhi would calmly reflect on the situation and take action which, though non-violent, was so amazingly powerful that it toppled what was perceived then as the most powerful empire in the world. For instance, when it became clear to Mahatma Gandhi that an injustice had been done to his people, whatever their religion or race, he would go into a fast-until-death until the injustice was undone.

Positive thinking and a proactive approach would then lead to a paradigm shift where we would need to be aware and acknowledge that our perception of any situation is only relative or part of the picture and never absolute. That would liberate us from bigotry and foster a spirit of accommodation. That, hopefully, would lead to a dialogue where each party would be open and listen to the other so that the perceptions of two, three or more parties when put together would form a new, broader and more acceptable perception. Into that haven of inner freedom, liberation from selfishness and accommodation, may the people of our country awake today.

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