The word noble may soon have to be dropped from the English dictionary, as it is a quality of character rarely encountered in the world today. Nobility implies so many traits! Restraint being the foremost. Conscious restraint of anger and all vices; self discipline; cleanliness; dignity of body position and speech and actions; selflessness; generosity; quietude; intelligence, high standards of behaviour; courtesy in actions and speech...seeking to achieve high ideals of service to mankind and evolution of consciousness. the list goes on. in Yoga such a person is called an Adikaran. A “person fit to enter higher realms of consciousness”. Such a person is also called Sattwic, or pure of nature. The word “Aryan” is sometimes used, which literally means “pure one,” to describe such noble souls.

Another word used to describe a “Noble soul” in India was the term “Brahmin”. The word “Brahmin” originally meant “one who had realized Brahmin (Cosmic Consciousness) an Adhi Karan, a pure one, a noble soul. The term “Brahmin” later degenerated to mean one born into the priestly caste. Through time, the high standard of character traits of the Brahmin priestly caste degenerated into mere ritualistic behaviour. The essence of the Brahmin character had degenerated so much by the time of the Mahabharata. (about 5000 years ago). That Ved Vyasa, the author of the epic, has Yudishthira the eldest of the Pandavas, answer the Yaksha in the PRASNA PARVA, who questioned him. “Who is a Brahmin? Is one a Brahmin by birth?” Yudhishtithra the King answers: “ A true Brahmin is known by Guna (Qualities of character) and not by Janma(birth).” In today’s society, many persons born to the Brahmin caste have a very deceptive veneer of softness, gentleness and refinement, because of their ancient holy genes, but their essential character is vicious. They are like chocolate coated scorpions or as Shakespeare had Othello lament: “Ah! Villain! Fair without and black within!” This is true for so many crude and vicious characters who are beautiful of body, charming in manner and speech, but totally cunning and vicious within. Because of their charisma they are able to easily lure weak souls from the higher to the lower life. Many a young woman has learned this lesson the hard way!

The opposite to the noble personality which we may call ignoble has gained prominence in almost all fields. Crude behaviour, crude speech, crude goals, crude attire, self-seeking, self-promoting. In -your-face egotists rule the roost. They elbow “noble souls” out of their way and kick them in the face on their way to the top!

Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani, Director ICYER at Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry
Virtue appears to be a vice in the rat race! Of course, rats are hardly noble creatures, one must admit, so it is best to drop out of such races. It is necessary to remind ourselves of the great importance of a noble life on a daily basis, lest we too lose our ideals and fall into the muck surrounding us. So common is crude behaviour that we are in constant danger of thinking that ignobility is normal and nobility is abnormal.

To refresh our spirit we must time and time again refer to the behaviour of heroes of our Indian culture. Sita especially comes to my mind. Sita is not very popular these days, especially amongst young women. The majority of young women consider Sita foolish at best, and Rama as a male chauvinist. They see her nobility of character as a vice, a detriment to her happy successful life and “personal fulfillment.”

Valmiki loved Sita and portrayed her true noble character in his great epic the Ramayana. After Rama’s coronation when things seemed to have settled down in Ayodhya, there was further unexpected sorrow for Sita. Rama sends Sita to the forest based on the rumours doing the rounds that she must have been violated by Ravana, a notorious womanizer, since she spent three years in his palace. Valmiki captures the poignancy of the situation as felt by Sita. When the truth that she is to be left all alone in the forest is clear to her from Lakshmana’s words, she displays a momentary sense of helplessness. Her mind falters and for a moment she seeks to blame Rama for his action. She tells Lakshmana, who had been entrusted by Rama to drop her in the forest as an exile: “I married Rama while young and since then I have considered him as my father, mother, and everything till date.” But the innate courage of a Kshatriya queen surges in her to subdue this feeling as she steels herself up to face the situation of going into forest exile, having to give birth without her husband. She tells Lakshmana: “Though Agni himself testified my chastity, Rama has done this to me. But Rama is a noble Kshatriya ruler of boundless repute. So if this has happened to me it is my fate and ill luck and not Rama’s fault.” She informs Lakshmana about her pregnant state and accepts the offer of Rishi Valmiki to live in his hermitage and be under his protection.

Sita’s distress is mitigated by the wise words of the Rishi sage who says to her, “When sorrows come, it makes no sense to analyse the cause: rather one should try to resolve the problem and learn to cope with them in a noble manner.” Valmiki offers solace to the sorrowing Sita by asking her to worship the Ikshvaku clan deity Sri Ranganatha.

For Rama’s part, he did not doubt Sita’s chastity. His commitment to the Kshatriya Dharma demanded that he bow to his people’s sentiments. They could not accept a queen whose chastity was in question. Sita had lived three years in Ravana’s palace as his captive. They could not believe she had not been violated. Rama rose above personal likes and dislikes. He too felt the pangs of separation from Sita and after her exile, lived in austerity while ruling Ayodhya righteously.

Such nobility of character and sentiment would be considered a “madness” in today’s contemporary world. Perhaps it is true. Nobility has no survival value in the crude material world. Noble souls may have to accept exile, perhaps even humiliation and death in such circumstances. However, in the spiritual world, nobility is the coin of the realm. Great spiritual riches are attained with this quality.

Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani, Director ICYER at Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry
Nobility and loneliness or crudity and oneness with the masses. It is a hard choice. But do we, who are on the Yoga path, have any other choice?

The higher we go the greater is the danger of the fall. One must be ever alert. If one gives in even for one moment to negativitiy, a tsunami of low minded thoughts and feelings will engulf the soul. In IV : 27 Yoga Sutras Patanjali says, “If there is even a small gap (in higher conscious thought) other deep impressions will take over the soul.”

The higher one rises in consciousness, the more vigilant one must be. The crude person can carelessly move through life without feeling too much pain. The noble soul will be badly hurt by even a small mistake.

Dr Ananda says in his book, An Exploration of the Yoga Sutra. A momentary lapse will spoil all previous efforts. The message is that one needs to be ever vigilant. The universal rule is, “The higher you rise in consciousness, the more vigilant you must be”. Beings at lower levels of evolution can get away with many mistakes as they live in such dissipated states of consciousness that their thoughts, words and actions have little power. But once the being evolves to higher levels, possessing great powers of concentration, even a small slip may result in catastrophe. Vigilance is the eternal price of liberty. Noble souls must be prepared to pay that price!