

The compassion imperative

Just prior to the lockdown, I was fortunate to have moved in with my daughter and her family; and was very comfortable. But anxiety had entered my meditation space and I was preoccupied with thoughts of the well-being of my family and myself. All along, I was aware of starving migrants and daily wage earners, who were helped by many across India. But I had not realized the enormity of the suffering, until I heard a few stories in the Teach For India community in our very own city of Pune. This impacted me deeply and it shook me out of my self-centredness and anxiety, and instead, I felt very grateful and privileged.

All of us who are well-to-do have depended on those at the bottom of the pyramid to serve us and make our lives comfortable. We did not have to do the drudgery, or unpleasant daily chores, at our homes or at our factories. Today, due to the corona pandemic, the poor are suffering and are either trapped in cities or are on the move without livelihood or family support. At their hour of need, can we reach out and serve them? Very often, we discount the emotion that the poor feel towards their children and families. The poor have their pride and have worked hard all their lives to eke out a living with dignity. Without having to beg for help, can we reach out and preserve their dignity?

There are no easy answers to the dilemmas which the sensitive business community will face. With limited cash, do I safeguard the business by asking employees to leave, or retain everyone and find innovative ways to survive? Can the privileged and corporate India open up their hearts and support non-governmental organizations who reach out to the deprived and denied? In normal times, corporates are largely concerned about profits, but at this time, can a sense of purpose towards the downtrodden take priority?

Covid-19 is a test for humanity. Getting over our self-centredness and forgetting our differences of caste, class and religion, can we together help out our fellow human beings? Let's remember that in the long run, business cannot survive in a society that fails.

- **Anu Aga**