

## Essay

# ROAD THAT I TOOK

by Musafir



I got a week off recently due to illness and hospitalization to spend time with myself, which is always a wonderfully centering experience for me. I love my alone time. I took the time to introspect about some relationships in my life. Lately I have been thinking a lot about accepting favors and its consequences. Asking favor gives rise to interpersonal maneuvering, jockeying over who owns what to whom. It is the beginning of a social contract setting up a power relationship.

We have all sought or accepted favors from others sometimes in our life. Whenever we take a favor from someone, we lose, at least, some of our self-respect and sell a part of our soul to the person doing the favor unless and until the favor is reciprocal and immediate. I think it all comes

down to empowerment. By taking favor we empower the giver to take control of our life to some extent depending upon the level of favor received. Seeking favors is very common in the old country where I come from. People live a life of humiliation and subjugation to the powerful who can bestow favors on the weak. Favors are needed there at every step of daily life whether it is getting an income tax certificate or obtaining driver's license or getting death benefits. At least that's the way it used to be when I was growing up

Coming to America, I noticed that the Americans don't accept favors without reciprocating. They don't need anyone's favor for fulfilling their daily obligations in the first place. The Americans,

invariably, go Dutch when having a meal in the restaurants. Whenever I bought coffee for them, they returned the favor immediately or the next day. They don't take ride without sharing the cost. I remember when I bought my first car, Mark, a neighbor of mine and then my co-worker in Indiana wanted to share ride to work with me. Coming from the old country, I gave him the ride the first day. He insisted that it was his turn to give me a ride to work the next morning. When I declined the offer, he filled the gas in my car and said, "I did my part." He never asked for a ride again.

Later I found out that this came to them (the Americans) from their Christian value: "But Jacob insisted, "No, if I have found favor with you, please accept this gift from me. And what a relief to see your friendly smile. It is like seeing the face of God!" -Genesis 33:10.

Now I avoid favors from anybody including my friends, siblings or children. Should this become unavoidable or seem disrespectful to deny, I always make sure to reciprocate in kind or cash. As I mentioned above, taking favor empowers the giver to deride the taker. It has happened to me in the past. I have often noticed sudden rudeness and disdain in the attitude of the favor-giver. Having to ask for favors puts you in a weak position. You expose a deficit (which the favor is supposed to fix) and you empower the other party to make a yes-no decision. Either way the other party comes out stronger and looks down upon you as a weaker person. The taker owes a debt of gratitude and the burden of future reciprocation. Awareness of this debt keeps many people from asking for favors in the first place, if they can at all avoid it.

There are some favors that cannot be avoided, returned or reciprocated. When a child is born, he/she has no other means to survive but depending on parent's or caretaker's mercy. One has to accept that this kind of favor cannot be repaid. A human being is born indebted to his parents/caretaker as they have propagated their lineage and are the cause for birth. According to

Hinduism, "Pitri-rin" (debt to parents) cannot be repaid. Your parents brought you into this world, protected you when you were weak and frail, fed you, clothed you, taught you, and even tolerated you. So, how is this debt repaid? Therefore, we should be always respectful and humble to our parents/care-givers.

I have felt that self-reliance is an important source of strength and energy. It keeps me in high spirit. It gives me courage to do anything. A man with self-reliance is bound to overcome the difficulties. He is never fazed in the face of any difficult situation. He is ready to do whatever is assigned to him. He is honored everywhere. Self-reliance should be the guiding principle of our life, ideals, and aspirations. I don't want any puppet strings trailing behind me. It has taken great courage and a lot of practice to learn how to take it off and let my self-worth stand on its own.

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one that dared me to try,  
And that has made all the difference." –Frost  
(Road Not Taken)