

One thing leading to another

American essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.” Within this quote is a fact of life: What’s planted in us leads to life consequences.

Poet Alexander Pope echoes Emerson in stating, “As a twig is bent, so is the tree inclined.”

Both poets point out the progression of one thing leading to another. When we apply this principle to the qualities of love, it paints a beautiful picture of progression.

Sow beneficence and you reap mercy; sow mercy and you reap peace; sow peace and you reap joy; sow the joy of almsgiving and you reap goodness par excellence. Beneficence is bigheartedness leading to mercy, then peace, joy and almsgiving.

Our world is filled with bighearted people practicing the above progression of love that counters hardheartedness. Unfortunately, there also exist some hardhearted people who mirror its antithesis. The two poets’ quotes give us one reason for this: They indirectly warn against focusing on one’s present well-being with little concern of where it will lead in the future. Envisioning a progression of events leading to the future is missing.

St. Isidore wrote, “A prudent man is one who sees as it were from afar, for his sight is keen, and he foresees the event of uncertainties.” Here prudence encourages us to leave our little world and look down the road at the bigger picture to better handle future challenges.

One way to describe our postmodern times is as a here-and-now age that is often

more fixed on present concerns, leaving the future to care for itself.

Take, for example, those who ridicule conservation. A quote by President Theodore Roosevelt that can be found in the Cox corridor of the House of Representatives counters these scoffers in stating, “The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased and not impaired in value.”

Bigmindedness looks at the connection between present concerns and future consequences, reminding us that one thing leads to another and to take seriously what that other might be.

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