



Parashari Vidya Prasarak Sanstha's  
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Mukhed Tal- Niphad Dist- Nashik

# On Saying "Please"

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# On Saying “Please”

*Alfred George Gardiner (1865 to 1946) was born at Chelmsford in Essex in 1865. He started his literary career as a journalist. At the age of 37, he was appointed editor of the Daily News, London. Under the pseudonym (pen name) ‘Alpha of the Plough’, he made regular contributions to the Daily News, The Manchester Evening News etc. His essays are uniformly elegant, graceful and humorous. ‘The Pillars of Society’, ‘Pebbles on the Shore’, ‘Many Furrows and Leaves in the Wind’ are some of his best known writings. His uniqueness lies in his ability to teach the basic truths of life in an easy and amusing manner. He raised the question of morality in everyday life.*

*In, On Saying “Please”, he points out the value of good manners in social life and emphasizes the importance of courtesy and politeness in daily behavior. He shows how polite speech and manner sweeten the atmosphere around and how discourtesy and ill manners spoil or pollute it.*



The young lift-man in a City office who threw a passenger out of his lift the other morning and was fined for the **offence** (अपराध) was **undoubtedly**(निःसंशयपणे) in the wrong. It was a question of “Please.” The complainant entering the lift, said, “Top.” The lift-man demanded “Top-please,” and this concession being refused he not only declined to **comply**(पालन करणे) with the instruction, but **hurled** (फेकणे) the passenger out of the lift. This, of course was carrying a comment on manner too far. **Discourtesy** (असभ्यता) is not a legal offence, and it does not excuse **assault and battery**(प्राण घातक हल्ला). If a **burglar** (दरोडेखोर) breaks into my house and I knock him down, the law will **acquit** (निर्दोष) me, and if I am physically assaulted, it will permit me to **retaliate** (बदला घेणे) with reasonable violence. It does this because the burglar and my **assailant** (हल्लेखोर) have broken quite definite commands of the law. But no legal system could attempt to **legislate** (कायदा करणे) against bad manners, or could sanction (मंजूरी) the use of **violence** (हिंसा) against something which it does not itself recognize as a legally punishable offence. And our sympathy with the lift-man, we must admit that the law is reasonable. It would never do if we were at liberty to **box** (ठोसे लगावणे) people’s ears because we did not like their behavior, or the tone of their voices, or the **scowl** (नाराजी दाखवणे) on their faces. Our **fists** (मूठ) would never be idle, and the gutters of the city would run with blood all day.

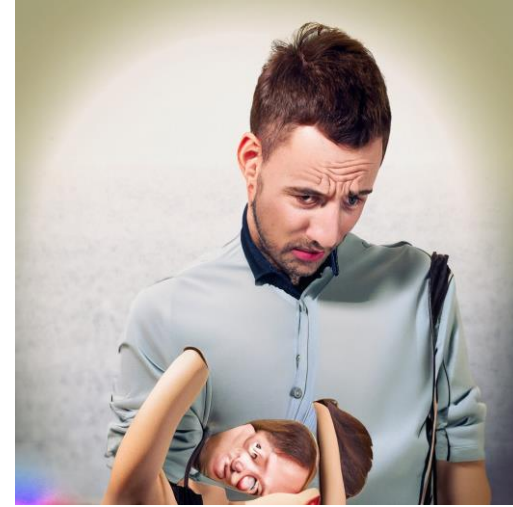


I may be as **uncivil** (असंस्कृत) as I may please and the law will protect me against violent retaliation. I may be **haughty**(गर्विष्ठ) or **boorish** (उद्धट) and there is no **penalty**(शिक्षा) to pay except the penalty of being written down an ill mannered fellow. The law does not compel me to say “Please” or to **attune**(मिळवणे) my voice to other people’s sensibilities any more than it says that I shall not wax my **moustache**(मिशी) or dye my hair or wear ringlets down my back. It does not recognize the **laceration**(मनाला होणाऱ्या वेदना) of our feelings as a case for **compensation**(भरपाई). There is no allowance for moral and intellectual damages in these matters.

This does not mean that the damages are **negligible**(उपेक्षणीय). It is probable that the lift-man was much more acutely hurt by what he regarded as a slur upon his social standing than he would have been if he had a kick on the **shins**(नडगी), for which he could have got a legal **redress**(कारवाई). The pain of a kick on the shins soon passes away but the pain of a wound to our self-respect or our **vanity**(स्वाभिमान) may poison a whole day. I can imagine that lift-man, denied the relief of throwing the author of his wound out of the lift, **brooding over** (खूप विचार करणे) the insult by the hour, and visiting his wife in the evening as the only way of restoring his **equilibrium**(मनस्थिती). For there are few things more catching than bad temper and bad manners. When Sir Anthony Absolute **bullied**(धमकावणे) Captain Absolute, the latter went out and bullied his man, Fag, whereupon Fag went out downstairs and kicked the page-boy.

Probably the man who said “Top” to the lift-man was really only getting back on his employer who had not said “Good morning” to him because he himself had been **henpecked** (बायकोने सतावणे) at breakfast by his wife, to whom the cook had been **insolent** (अतिशय उद्धट वर्तन) because the housemaid had “answered her back”. We infect the world with our ill- humours . Bad manners probably do more to poison the stream of the general life than all the crimes in the **calendar**(गुन्ह्यांच्या खटल्यांची यादी). For one wife who gets a **black eye** (मारल्याने डोळा काळा पडणे) from an otherwise good-natured husband there are a hundred who live a life of **martyrdom** (हौतात्म्य) under the shadow of a **morose** (चिडलेला) temper. But all the same the law cannot become the guardian of our private manners. No **Decalogue** (धर्मग्रंथ) could cover the vast area of offences and no court could administer a law which governed our social civilities, our speech, the tilt of our eyebrows and all our moods and manners.

But though we are bound to **endorse** (समर्थन) the **verdict** (निर्णय) against the lift-man, most people will have a certain sympathy with him. While it is true that there is no law that compels us to say “Please”, there is a social practice much older and much more sacred than any law which enjoins us to be civil. And the first requirement of **civility** (सभ्यता) is that we should acknowledge a service. “Please” and “Thank you” are the small change with which we pay our ways as social beings. They are the little courtesies by which we keep the machine of life oiled and running sweetly. They put our **intercourse** (संवाद) upon the basis of a friendly co-operation, an easy give-and-take, instead of on the basis of superiors dictating to inferiors. It is a very vulgar mind that would wish to command where he can have the service for asking, and have it with willingness and good-feeling instead of **resentment** (नाराजी).



I should like to “feature” in this connection my friend, the polite conductor. By this **discriminating** (भेदभाव) title I do not intend to suggest a rebuke to conductors generally. On the contrary, I am disposed to think that there are few classes of men who come through the **ordeal** (वेदनादायी अनुभव) of a very trying calling better than bus conductors do. Here and there you will meet an unpleasant specimen who regards the passengers as his natural enemies - as creatures whose chief purpose on the bus is to cheat him, and who can only be kept reasonably honest by a loud voice and an aggressive manner. But this type is rare - rarer than it used to be. I fancy the public owes much to the Underground Railway Company, which also runs the buses, for insisting on a certain standard of civility in its servants and taking care that standard is observed. In doing this it not only makes things pleasant for the travelling public, but performs an important social service.

It is not, therefore, with any feeling of unfriendliness to conductors as a class that I pay a tribute to a particular member of that class. I first became conscious of his existence one day when I jumped on to a bus and found that I had left home without any money in my pocket. Everyone has had the experience and knows the feeling, the mixed feeling, which the discovery arouses. You are annoyed because you look like a fool at the best and like a **knave** (लबाड) at the worst. You would not be at all surprised if the conductor eyed you coldly as much as to say, “Yes, I know that stale old trick. Now then, off you get.” And even if the conductor is a good fellow and lets you down easily, you are faced with the necessity of going back, and the inconvenience, perhaps, of missing your train or your engagement.



Having searched my pockets in vain for stray coppers, and having found I was utterly penniless, I told the conductor with as honest a face as I could assume that I couldn't pay the fare, and must go back for money. "Oh you needn't get off: that's all right," said he. "All right," said I, "but I haven't a copper on me." "Oh, I'll book you through," he replied. "Where d'ye want to go?" and he handled his bundle of tickets with the air of a man who was prepared to give me a ticket for anywhere from the Bank to Hong Kong. I said it was very kind of him, and told him where I wanted to go, and as he gave me the ticket I said, "But where shall I send the fare?" "Oh, you'll see me some day all right," he said cheerfully, he turned to go. And then, luckily, my fingers, still wandering in the corner of my pockets lighted on a shilling and the account was squared(हिशोब चुकता करणे). But that fact did not lessen the glow of pleasure which so good-natured an action had given me.



A few days after, my most sensitive toe was **trampled on** (चिरडला गेला) rather heavily as I sat reading on the top of a bus. I looked up with some anger and more agony, and saw my friend of the cheerful **countenance** (चेहरा). “Sorry, sir,” he said. “I know these are heavy boots. Got’ em because my own feet get **trod on** (तुडवला जाणे) so much, and now I’m **treading** (पायावर पाय देणे) on other people’s. Hope I didn’t hurt you, sir.” He had hurt me but he was so nice about it that I **assured**(आश्वासन देणे) him he hadn’t. After this I began to observe him whenever I boarded his bus, and found a curious pleasure in the constant good-nature of his bearing. He seemed to have an **inexhaustible** (अफाट) fund of patience and a gift for making his passengers comfortable. I noticed that if it was raining he would run up the stairs to give someone the tip that there was “room inside”. With old people he was as considerate as a son, and with children as **solicitous** (काळजी घेणारा) as a father. He had evidently a peculiarly warm place in his heart for young people, and always indulged in some merry **jest**(थट्टा)with them. If he had a blind man on board it was not enough to set him down safely on the pavement. He would call to Bill in front to wait while he took him across the road or round the corner, or otherwise safely on his way. In short, I found that he **irradiated**(पसरवणे) such an atmosphere of good-temper and kindness that a journey with him was a lesson in natural courtesy and good manners.



What struck me particularly was the ease with which he got through his work. If bad manners are infectious, so also are good manners. If we encounter incivility most of us are apt to become uncivil, but it is an unusually **uncouth** (संस्कार हीन) person who can be disagreeable with sunny people. It is with manners as with the weather. “Nothing clears up my spirits like a fine day,” said Keats, and a cheerful person descends on even the gloomiest of us with something of the **benediction** (आशीर्वाद) of a fine day. And so it was always fine weather on the polite conductor’s bus, and his own **civility** (असभ्य) , his **conciliatory** (समजुतदारपणा) address and good-humored bearing, infected his passengers. In lightening their spirits he lightened his own task. His **gaiety** (चांगुलपणा) was not a wasteful luxury, but a sound investment.

I have missed him from my bus route of late; but I hope that only means that he has carried his sunshine on to another road. It cannot be too widely diffused in a rather drab world. And I make no apologies for writing a **panegyric**(कौतुक) on an unknown bus conductor. If Wordsworth could gather lessons of wisdom from the poor **leech-gatherer**(जळवा गोळा करणारा) ‘on the lonely moor’, I see no reason why lesser people should not take lessons in conduct from one who shows how a very modest calling may be dignified by good-temper and kindly feeling.



**Leech**

It is a matter of general agreement that the war has had a chilling effect upon those little everyday civilities of behaviour that sweeten the general air. We must get those civilities back if we are to make life kindly and tolerable for each other. We cannot get them back by invoking the law. The policeman is a necessary symbol and the law is a necessary institution for a society that is still some-what **lower than the angels**(सुसंस्कृत नसलेला). But the law can only protect us against material attack. Nor will the lift-man's way of meeting **moral affront** (नैतिक अपमान) by physical violence help us to restore the civilities. I suggest to him, that he would have had a more **subtle**(सूक्ष्म) and effective revenge if he had treated the gentleman who would not say "Please" with elaborate politeness. He would have had the victory, not only over the **boor**, (उद्धट) but over himself, and that is the victory that counts. The polite man may lose the material advantage, but he always has the spiritual victory. I commend to the lift-man a story of **Chesterfield**. In his time the London streets were without the pavements of today, and the man who "took the wall" had the driest footing. "I never give the wall to a scoundrel," said a man who met Chesterfield one day in the street. "I always do," said Chesterfield, stepping with a bow into the road. I hope the lift-man will agree that his revenge was much more sweet than if he had flung the fellow into the mud.



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