



Some Nine Steps to Heaven

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Around this time last year, we were in the same position (New Year's resolutions wise) as we hope not to be around this time next year. But, it is not easy to spin tangentially out of a cycle, partly due to the inevitability, call it destiny, excuse maybe, and largely owing to our lack of focus and steadfastness and sincerity as well as vain belief that a New Year is obvious every year.

On solemn reflection, let us pay our respects to those who have passed away over the past year, and mind you, many of them did have their 2014 resolutions; death was certainly not one of them.

The resolutions thing is very much a Western practice, but so are New Year's celebrations, birthdays, wedding anniversaries, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Valentine's Day. Thank God! We are out of April Fool's Day.

Resolution 1: Everyone in Bangladesh is complaining about the rise of bribery; that you need to make some crucial people happy by pecuniary and

other undeserving means to secure a job, to get promoted, to get a building plan passed, to get the police off your back, to keep your tale out of the media, to get elected, and so on. My question is if everyone is aggrieved, then who is taking the *ghoosh*? Simply, answered, it means a person who takes a bribe has also to bribe another to get another job done. It is like barter trade. Everyone has a need, and everyone has a demand. This resolution (*I will not take bribe*) can only work in a society where individuals voluntarily withdraw from this inebriated habit. And, kudos! There are many who do not. Pssst! Religious conviction can and should help.

Resolution 2: The easiest one to stop doing could be lying. Mobile telephone culture has encouraged untruthfulness because we are at some place and claim to be somewhere else. Such fibs are often to avoid the *paonadar* or any other person for whatever the reason. More alarmingly, we maybe are with someone and for fear of reprisal claim to be alone. If

accidentally your (hidden) partner makes a sound that is heard at the other end (of the phone, I mean), you have to carry on in that tone or claim there is a cross-connection, which you must remember never happens on a cell phone. Jokes aside, let us promise to put our correct birthday on our JSC/SSC form. Let us inform a suitor (and vice versa) our correct degree. Let the world know exactly what we do for a living. There is no greater pride than being truthful.

Resolution 3: We do not need to wake up in a new year to start behaving well with our respective parents/ husband/ wife/ social partner/ business partner/ colleague/ employees, but we vow in the depth of our conscience (where no one can find out) that from 1.1 there will be no more shouting, blaming, cheating, bullying, and abusing. This one is easier than giving up smoking, and so our unusual demeanour lasts the first week, after which it is a free-for-all. The fight then commences with our inner soul to as to who broke the pledge. Was it me? Never! Was it him? Her? Of course! We are back to square one.

Resolution 4: *Dosto! Hic! You will see this is my last bottle. Hikkichi! I promise to you, dotto, I will not touch this evil thing again. Hics! This has ruined so many families and people. But, totto, I am saved because of you.* You think, if simply by sitting next to a habitual drinker you can help the guy to kick his habit, you have never sat so well in your life. Then again, you know, and he knows that it is the bottle doing the talking. For a

see a motorcycle plying on the footpath! Pee-peep-peeep! This one will be difficult but cotton wool plugged in the ears and blindfolding may help your cause except that you risk being run over, in which case they may honk to hell, but you will land up in heaven.

Resolution 7: December is the season for picnics. Schools, businesses, industries, *para-mahallas*, and clubs, societies and associations are all out there dirtying the countryside. You can see empty plastic packets, half-full food wraps, banana peel, egg *chilka*, food processed in the stomach, etc. fall from running buses and cars. I say "you can see" because those who throw can't see. They don't know they are doing anything wrong; they are in fact very clean people, and keeping the inside of the vehicle clean. We must promise not to litter the street and outdoor spaces. Please! But, for this resolution to work, we must think outside the bus and/or car. And, for heaven's sake! Don't drag Modi into this. "Cleanliness is godliness" is much older than Narendra Modi's very recent *Swachh Bharat* (clean India) campaign.

Resolution 8: Excessive sugar, salt and oil is bad for our health, and at a certain age and condition we have to give them up, even if partially so, just like several other customs, and right now is the right time to say 'NO' to things that we know are not great for us anymore. And, hey! There are millions other things that are. Fish, several nuts, white of the egg, *lau*, *kodu*,

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person to give up alcohol, his last bottle has to be his last, not the bottle in his hand.

Resolution 5: One does not need to wait for *pahela* January to give up smoking, but (because we are committed to give it up) we think we have perhaps a legitimate excuse to puff away to our heart's content (if only we knew) throughout December. Some people try to do it gradually. From two packets a day, they come down to ten a day, then five. The problem is the run rate sometimes increases after a bad patch. Come the New Year, we console our mind by holding on to the burning stick that a habit of a decade or two cannot die overnight, but in fact, many do, die, that is.

Resolution 6: I will not get angry if drivers honk for pleasure (because most likely the car does not have a music system). *Honk! Hoot! Pyyaap!* I will not get upset on the road if (despite a court order) I see drivers driving in the opposite direction! *Vrr-vrrr-vrrroom!* I will not mind if (despite a court order) I

korolla... sorry, it was not my intention to offend anyone.

Resolution 9: The principal antidote to a burdened mind, body and soul is friendship; innocent, selfless and childlike. This New Year let us re-friend those with whom we have fallen out. Yup! Life is short. Let us call someone with whom we have not spoken for this or that reason for the past year or more. Let us surprise him/her. Let us be magnanimous. Come on! This will be a new year that was never ever before, nor will ever be another like this one. We are blessed to be here. Let us spread the blessings.

If we give up taking bribe, lying, bad behaviour, drinking, smoking, irresponsible driving, throwing garbage indiscriminately, sugar, salt and oil to some extent, and ill feelings towards all, or some of these bad traits and others not listed here, I tell you our lives in Bangladesh would be just that much closer to living in heaven on earth. ■