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Why Scandals Shock Us, And Shouldn't



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By Acharya Prashant



A scandal is not a new revelation. It is a long-overdue and grudging declaration of our inability to keep ignoring what was already there all along. The question, then, is not why the scandal surfaced, but how it remained hidden at all. And why something so obvious and axiomatic required loud exposure before it could be acknowledged.

The Epstein files revealed nothing about the principle that should have required revelation in the first place. They merely c... power, wherever it accumulates, tends to be used for consumption, gratification, and dominance. The names were new; the

principle was ancient. Yet the public response treated it as a rupture, as though something unprecedented had occurred.

Why does it take a scandal for this to be recognised? How does a culture succeed in presenting those who dominate attention as figures of decency or merit? Admiration is extended with remarkable ease to celebrities, entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, and politicians, as though visibility itself were evidence of worth. That is the question worth examining. Not “How could they?” but “How did this belief come to be accepted at all?”

The shock itself is revealing. It is not evidence of their fall so much as evidence of the illusion that had been maintained.

Events and Principles

There are two broad ways to learn about the world. One is by reacting to events as they erupt. The other is by understanding the principles that govern how things unfold, whether or not those events have yet made themselves visible.

Consider a ball of radioactive material. You can toss it around, handle it casually, keep adding to it. Nothing seems to happen. Then one day, the critical threshold is crossed, and there is a catastrophic explosion. Only then do we say we have learned something about nuclear physics.

Would anyone choose to be educated this way? Would you wait for disaster to teach you what could have been understood much earlier from first principles? The principle of critical mass was always available. The explosion merely confirmed what that principle had been saying all along.

So it is with the human mind. We keep waiting for scandals to educate us. Every few years, another file leaks, another network is exposed, another set of names tumbles into public view. And each time, the same ritual follows: shock, moral outrage, op-eds, and then forgetting.

Yet the principle was always there. It is simple enough. The unexamined, animalistic ego, when given power, uses that power for its own consumption and gratification. This is not cynicism or pessimism. It is a plain observation, available to anyone willing to look without sentimentality.

What would one rather be educated by: the event or the principle? If one relies on events, shock is guaranteed, again and again, because most misdeeds never come fully to light. Scandals are not reliable teachers. If one relies on principle, shock loses its grip, because what unfolds is recognised rather than discovered.

We participate in our own deception because we need the illusion to continue.

Watch how this works. Celebrity culture quietly suggests that fame indicates virtue. Corporate branding makes profit appear as service. Philanthropy launders reputation into respectability. The language of ideas and innovation often turns exploitation into inspiration. Magazine covers make accumulation look like achievement. The entire machinery runs on a single fuel: the need to believe that the ladder being climbed leads somewhere noble.

If success were only a more sophisticated form of the same hunger, what would be the point of striving at all? The ego cannot tolerate this question. So it constructs heroes. It needs its billionaires to be benevolent, its celebrities to be wise, its leaders to be principled. The idol must appear flawless if worship is to continue.

When the clay is exposed, idol-worship itself is rarely questioned. A new idol is found, and the ritual resumes. Certain individuals are condemned, others quietly excused, as though the system were sound and only a few bad actors had slipped through. But in that sense, exceptions are rare and largely irrelevant to how the system routinely functions. The system reliably produces individuals of the same kind.

The propaganda succeeds because it satisfies a psychological need. It is easier to believe in benevolent billionaires than to face the uncomfortable truth that the world rewards accumulation, and that accumulation ultimately serves the accumulator.

The Gorilla in the Necktie

At this point, the inquiry has to go deeper. The question is no longer merely sociological or institutional. It is anthropological. It concerns what the human being actually is, beneath titles, refinement, and social polish.

Homo sapiens emerged from the jungle. The intellect has arrived, yes. The prefrontal cortex has expanded. Language, culture, and technology are new. But the centre from which all this operates has largely remained the same. Modern capacities are governed by a deeply animalistic centre. The tools are advanced; the master they serve is prehistoric.

The evidence is not subtle. Human beings now account for over a third of all mammal biomass on this planet. Almost all the rest consists of animals bred for our consumption: cows, pigs, chickens, sheep. What remains for wild mammals is a sliver. This is how the unexamined centre operates. What is useful is pushed toward extinction. We have eaten the world and called it progress.

This is the principle that governs the world when the ego is left unexamined: greed and power. Wherever the primitive ego operates, it does so violently and exploitatively. Real nobility, real decency, are precisely what the ego cannot tolerate.

Now place this unexamined centre in a boardroom, a venture capital firm, or a political office. The suit is expensive, the vocabulary sophisticated, the smile professionally practiced. Yet behind that smile are the same teeth. The corporate handshake conceals the same claw.

A gorilla in a necktie. That is what one is looking at when one looks at a person of power who has not undergone a genuine inner transformation. Everything around him exists to serve his appetite. He pays you only as long as you earn him many times what he pays. And if someone has accumulated at that scale, what was it accumulated for? Charity? The betterment of humanity? No. For consumption, for territory, for the ancient satisfactions of dominance.

What kind of naivete, or what kind of self-serving need, allows one to believe otherwise? What permits the fantasy that a billionaire earned his billions for anyone's benefit but his own? He earned them to consume, to expand territory, to exhaust resources. That is the principle at work, and it is the one the structure reliably rewards.

Behind the formal corporate smile is a wild face with sharp teeth. If there is a fixer available who can procure whatever the appetite demands, the appetite will make use of him. None of this should require a scandal to understand. It is obvious from first principles.

But is there no exception? Is every human being merely a more sophisticated predator?

The exceptions do exist: the Buddha, Kabir Saheb, and a handful of sages scattered across history who genuinely stepped outside the pattern. They are exceptions precisely because transcending the ego requires sustained inner work, not verbal agreement or moral posturing. It requires the dissolution of the very centre that seeks, accumulates, and defends.

Apart from such exceptions, selflessness should not be assumed. Good intentions are not transformation. Philanthropy is not renunciation. The ego can wear any costume, including the costume of virtue. It can speak fluently of sustainability, equity, and social impact while continuing to operate from the same ancient hunger. The vocabulary updates; the centre remains.

When power is held without inner clarity, it is put to the meanest and lowest kinds of use, usually away from public view. That is why it is not seen and why delusion persists. One continues to think: I admired f... and corrupt; the remaining three

must be different. The remaining three are simply not yet tested, not yet seen clearly, or not yet visible.

Waiting for exposure is a poor strategy. Principles are the only reliable teachers.

The Abuse Is Everywhere

This is where most commentary stops short. It condemns specific individuals and specific crimes, then congratulates itself on having achieved moral clarity.

But honesty requires going further.

It is true that children are abused by certain powerful individuals. But if there is one group within our species that faces sustained abuse, it is children. And this abuse is not confined to hidden islands or secret networks. It occurs everywhere: in homes, in schools, in religious institutions, and in families that consider themselves loving.

It is not only physical abuse. A child is conditioned from birth, loaded with beliefs, a culture, a religion, a set of fears and aspirations. A mind is shaped before it has any capacity to question what is being poured into it. One could argue that such psychological conditioning cuts deeper than physical harm, because it imprisons invisibly. The body may heal; the mind can remain caged for decades.

This happens everywhere, not only in certain places or at the hands of certain individuals. It happens because human beings operate without self-knowledge, driven by the same unexamined centre.

The same principle operates universally. The exploiter and the ordinary parent can act from the same unexamined centre. The difference is not of essence, but of opportunity, scale, secrecy, and the social permissions available.

A young person once confronted me: "If the system is this corrupt, what are my options? Every path seems to lead to serving these masters. If I work for a corporation, the profits enrich shareholders who may be monsters. If I work for the government, I fund politicians who may be worse. What do I do? Am I complicit simply by participating?"

The question reveals its own error. It locates the problem entirely outside and then declares helplessness. "I have no options." That statement is an insult to one's own consciousness.

Inert matter has no options. A ball goes up and must fall. Rolled on a frictionless surface, it keeps rolling. Dead, unconscious matter does not generate alternatives.

But a human being is not inert matter. Consciousness itself is the capacity to choose. If choices are not immediately visible, they can be generated. That is the power being denied when helplessness is declared.

Does such helplessness befit a young person? Does it befit anyone who claims awareness? "I don't have options" sounds jarring from someone capable of thinking, refusing, and creating alternatives. One is not born to obey or to toe the line. One is born to live by the heart, and the heart is always in love with truth.

I have been at this same point before. Had I concluded that there were no options except to become a technocrat, a bureaucrat, or a manager, this piece would not exist. A way was found. It is always found, unless surrender has already taken place.

Children are not protected by resolutions condemning specific names. They are protected when enough people refuse to serve the system that produces such individuals. When lending one's intelligence and labour to known predators becomes intolerable, not because a scandal has broken, but because the principle has been understood.

The responsibility does not lie "out there". It begins here.

Principles Over Events

Notice what genuinely disturbs us when a scandal breaks. It is not compassion for victims; that fades quickly. It is not concern for justice either; most of us do not follow the proceedings for long. What truly unsettles us is the disruption of belief. We had invested in certain images, and those images have cracked.

The young person asking about complicity was not concerned only with abused children. He was also confronting his own discomfort at discovering that his role models were hollow. That discomfort is the real content of the question, and it matters, but only if it is turned inward.

That disruption should lead to inquiry. How did one allow oneself to be convinced in the first place? What within demanded that power and goodness go together? When such questions are honestly pursued, they lead somewhere. They lead to the examination of one's ego, one's hunger for heroes, one's reluctance to see the animal in oneself. The scandal is out there; the inquiry is in here. And only the i transformation.

Without that inward turn, scandals change nothing. A few individuals are condemned, the system is preserved, new idols are found, and the next shock is awaited. The pattern repeats because the pattern-maker within is never examined.

Extend the logic to its conclusion. The Doomsday Clock now stands at eighty-five seconds to midnight, the closest it has ever been to civilisational collapse. And still celebrities are worshipped, autographs are sought, admiration loudly declared. The tragedy is not that a few billionaires escaped to private islands while the world burned. The tragedy is that the crowd below kept defending, kept imitating, kept applauding.

When escape becomes possible for the few who have consumed the earth, the crowd below will still be waving. That is the depth of the delusion.

The system does not run on conspiracy. It runs on aspiration, on what is admired, imitated, and quietly desired. Funding does not occur only through money; it occurs through votes, attention, and admiration. A "like" is not innocent. It is a small but steady investment in the very system one claims to oppose.

There will be more scandals. New names will surface. New files will leak. None of this will change anything fundamental as long as the underlying centre remains unchanged. What can change something is the refusal to be shocked in the first place, not out of cynicism, but out of clarity. When the principle is understood, the event becomes mere confirmation.

The principle itself is simple. The unexamined ego, when given power, uses that power for gratification. It consumes, exploits, and dominates because that is what it does. It makes little difference whether it wears a suit or a robe, speaks the language of innovation or tradition, or waves one flag or another. The centre remains the same. The hunger remains the same.

When this is seen clearly, shock dissolves. What remains is a sober recognition of what we are dealing with, and a serious question of what must be done. What must be done is not primarily political. It is primarily inner. The same ego that produces monsters also operates at smaller scales, given less opportunity. The difference is one of degree, not of kind.

Examine the centre from which one operates, and something real has been done. Condemn others while leaving that centre untouched, and nothing changes; only noise is added to noise.

So the question is not, "How could they?"

The question is, "Why was it ever believed that they could?"

And beneath that lies the more fundamental question: **Why was it ever believed that they could?** needed that belief?

Turned inward with ruthless honesty, that question is where the real work begins. The scandal merely provided the occasion. The inquiry must go deeper than the occasion.

The next scandal will come. One can choose to be shocked again, or choose to have already understood.

The principle was always available. It remains available. The only question is whether one is willing to see it, and to see oneself in its light.

That seeing is not comfortable. But it is honest. And honesty is the only ground on which anything true can be built.

Acharya Prashant is a teacher and author whose work centres on self-inquiry and its application to contemporary life.

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S Sheelvrat Mishra 10 Feb 2026

The root cause of all evils in the external world is the unexamined centre within, be it environmental degradation, climate crisis, exploitative relationships, disparities in society and no end of other such things. If we understand this principle, then no such event will be a shock for us. This is not cynicism but clarity.

R Reena 10 Feb 2026

So deep and so analyzed, and.