

Full Length Research

CHARACTER FORMATION IN THE LIGHT OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Dr. Santosh Kumar Behera

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia, West Bengal.
Email: santoshbehera.jkc@gmail.com

Accepted 11 September 2014

“When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is *lost, all is lost*”. Now the caption is very much pertinent in this present millennium under the context of Character Building for mankind when a greater part of this society used to run after name, fame, money and power even at the cost of own life. If one becomes determinate on the one aim of God realization, then man will turn towards God. On turning towards God, good qualities, good conduct come on their own, and character building begins to take place. However, if a man forgets about God realization and begins to hoard worldly possessions and enjoy sense pleasures, then he falls down in character. He, who loses his character, is not even worthy and deserving of being called a man. He himself is the central theme of building character. He is more valuable than any possession in the universe. In this context, Swami Vivekananda said that, “neither money pays, nor name, nor fame, nor learning; It is CHARACTER that can cleave through adamant walls of difficulties. The purpose of education is Man-Making and Character building of the students. Defining character, Vivekananda said, “The character of any man is the aggregate of his tendencies, but the sum of the total bent of his mind. As pleasure and pain pass before his soul, they leave upon it different pictures and the result of these combined impressions is what is called a man’s character”. The present paper will try to shed some light on the character and character formation in the light of Swami Vivekananda.

Key Words: Education, Man-Making, Character, Character formation.

Cite This Article as: Behera SK (2014). Character formation in the light of Swami Vivekananda. Inter. J. Acad. Res. Educ. Rev. 2(8): 186-193.

INTRODUCTION

“Education must provide Life-Building, Man-Making and Character-Making assimilation of ideas”.

----- Swami Vivekananda (CW, Vol. III, p. 302)

Swami Vivekananda was one of the greatest educationists of India. He not only enlightened India but

also the whole world by his outstanding personality and intellectuals. Swami Vivekananda was a man of versatile genius. He was a patriot saint, a lover of art and architecture, a classical singer, a commanding orator of great charm, a visionary, a philosopher, an educationist, and above all a worshipper of humanity. There is no place in life where Swami Vivekananda did not keep /

touch of his sincere efforts and foot steps with them. His educational ideas are based on love, peace and equity which combined the whole world. He propagated the essence of truth, Vedanta, brotherhood of men, unity of humanity, harmony of religions and supremacy of spiritualism over materialism. He shines like a luminous star in the galaxy of intellectuals. He was the torch-bearer of new light, new path and humanism. Education, he said, must provide "Life-building, Man-Making and character-making assimilation of ideas" (CW.III, 302). According to him, education is not mere acquisition of certain information. Real education is that which enables one to stand on one's own legs. Education, as he says, is the manifestation of the perfection already in man (CW.IV, 358). Education should stress on the formation of good moral character, Education without character is no education. To him "education is one by which character is formed, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet" (CW. V, 342). According to Martin Luther King Jr., Nobel Prize-winning 20th-century American civil rights leader, "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically... Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education" (<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkhaveadr eam.htm>).

CONCEPT OF CHARACTER:

Character implies a peculiarity of mental constitution which distinguishes one individual from another. Character is formed through the uniform exercise of will in certain directions. The 'nature' of man and his 'character' are not the same things. Man's 'nature' is inherited; but his 'character' is acquired through voluntary acts. Character stands for our moral constitution as it is modified by our personal efforts. Character is a permanent mental disposition built out of repeated voluntary acts involving the rational control of natural impulses and addressed to a definite moral ideal. Character arises out of our emotions, impulses, instincts etc. Conduct is the expression of character in a series of outward acts. Character expressed in conduct. Character determines the nature of outward conduct and also expresses itself in conduct. Thus character and conduct are intimately related (Sanyal, 2004).

Character is defined as qualities or features by which a person or a thing is distinguished from another; the aggregate of distinguishing mental and moral qualities of an individual or a race as a whole; the stamp of individuality impressed by nature, education or habit; that which a person or a thing really is (<http://www.charityathome.org>). Character is an ingrained

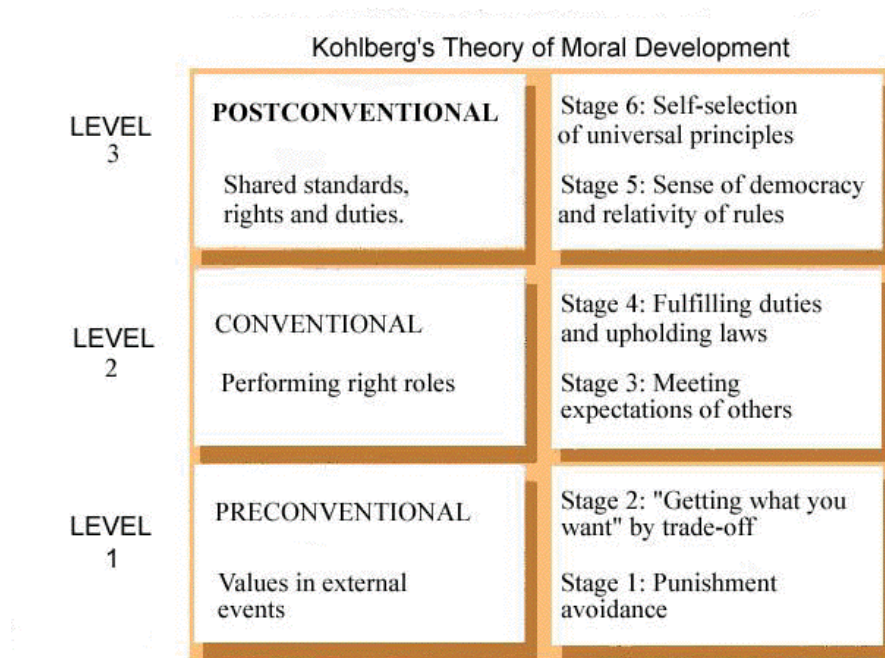
tendency. When someone with a good character becomes bad, instead of admitting that the old faultless character got deteriorated, we tend to mention a pre-existing defect (even if we were not aware previously). Once a character is formed, it stands firm. With respect to this context, character differs from both virtue and honesty since we are more ready to accept that the other two could be deformed or decomposed. One meaning is the behaviour of a person. When a person misbehaves or violates some accepted forms of social and moral practices, he is often said to be a man of loose or weak character. Another meaning of character, in literary circles, is simply the way a person's personality or life is portrayed in a book or story or article. This means a mixture of his good and bad traits. It is an evaluation of an individual's moral qualities through the role he or she plays in a story or situation. The word character, hence, could mean both good and bad qualities.

Jean Piaget (1965) was the first psychologist to suggest a theory of moral development. Piaget's First Stage: Moral Realism – In this stage children tend to have a clear sense of right and wrong, although they believe that there is typically only one right answer to every situation. They tend to trust adults at this stage and do not question an adult's moral judgments. At this stage, children tend to believe in moral absolutes and tend to only see a situation from their limited perspective. Piaget's Second Stage: Morality of Reciprocity – In this stage, children begin to understand that rules and regulations are formed through negotiation. Children learn that rules can be changed and they see the world through the eyes of other people. They are able to comprehend that there may be more than one right answer. They believe that punishment should act as restitution for immoral acts. They begin to use logic and hypotheses at this stage. Piaget's Third Stage: Mature Adult Thinking – In this stage, many different moral issues are addressed through practical decision making. People at this stage, the ethics of cooperation and the complexity of moral issues are better understood.

Kohlberg (1989) also developed a theory about the stages people pass through in developing moral thinking. There are three levels of Moral development- Pre-conventional, Conventional and Post –conventional. The figure of Kohlberg's Moral development is given in Figure 1.

There are some definitions of character which are given below:

- Baron Thomas Babington Macauley, Early 19th-century English Historian, "The measure of a man's real character is what he would do if he knew he would never be found out."



(Source: www.thepassiveeuthansiaforum.weebly.com/uploads/2/4/4/8/24489486/760918_orig.gif).

Figure 1. Kohlberg's Moral development

- According to Swami Vivekananda (VII. 487), *"what you want is character, strengthening of the will. Continue to exercise your will and it will take you higher. This will is almighty. It is character that can cleave through adamant walls of difficulties"*.
- Defining character, Vivekananda (1984, p.25) said "the character of any man is the aggregate of his tendencies, but the sum of the total bent of his mind. As pleasure and pain pass before his soul, they leave upon it different pictures and the result of these combined impressions is what is called a man's character".
- Wiley (1998) suggested that character is a reliable inner disposition to act in a morally good way, having qualities such as honesty and integrity.
- Ryan and Bohlin (1999) define good character as knowing the good, loving the good, and doing the good.
- Berkowitz (2002) says character is made up of those personal characteristics that lead a person to do the right thing in a given situation as opposed to not doing the right thing.
- By character, Davis (2003) means a person's fixed, general nature by acting morally. It is accepted that character is a person's common quality. The approximate synonyms of character are "good character", "moral

character", "moral integrity", and "virtue".

Character is composed of your personal standards of behavior including:

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Moral strength

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHARACTER:

According to Berkowitz (2002, pp.43-63) there are some characteristics of Character which are given below:

- Character is a multifaceted phenomenon.
- The components of character tend to have their own developmental trajectories.
- People all develop at different rates.
- The developmental sequence of the components of character different in different people.
- The components of character develop gradually or in stages over an extended period of time.

These are also the characteristics of Character:

- Character is the result of values and beliefs.
- Character is a habit that becomes second nature.
- Character is not reputation or what others think about you.
- Character is not how much better you are than others.
- Character is not relative.

SIX PILLARS OF CHARACTER

According to the Josephson Institute of Ethics there are Six Pillars of Character (Joy Rousseau, 2003).

I. RESPECT

Montaigne Essays (1580-1588) “The honor we receive from those that fear us, is not honor”

- The essence of respect is to show solemn regard for the worth of people, including oneself.
- The ethical duty is to treat everyone with respect – not to respect everyone in the sense that we admire them.
- Treating people with respect means letting them know that their safety, and happiness matter, that they are important and worthy simply because they are fellow human beings.
- Our duty to be respectful requires that we treat others with courtesy and consideration.
- It means we behave according to accepted notions of taste, propriety, and decency.
- It means we honor traditions, customs, and beliefs important to others.
- People are not things.
- All of us have a basic right to be treated with dignity.
- The well-being of all people is important; no person should be used simply as an instrument of another’s needs.
- Live by the Golden Rule.
- Respect other’s dignity, privacy, freedom, and possessions.
- Be Courteous and Polite.
- Be Tolerant and Accepting of Differences.
- Respect the autonomy of others

Characteristics of Respect- Tolerance, Acceptance, Autonomy, Privacy, Nonviolence, Courteous, Polite and Concerned.

II. RESPONSIBILITY

- Life is full of choices...being responsible means being in charge of our choices, and thus, our lives.

- Responsibility means being accountable for what we do and who we are.
- Everyone is responsible for the development of his or her personal character.
- Do your duty.
- Be accountable.
- Pursue excellence.
- Exercise self-control.
- Acknowledge and meet your legal and moral obligations

III. FAIRNESS

- Being fair is a moral obligation.

IV. CARING

- Caring is the “glue” of society without caring we are less than moral beings
- A. compassion
- B. kindness
- C. consideration
- D. charity

V. CIVIC DUTY (CITIZENSHIP)

Civic duty implies obligations to contribute to the overall public good. it refers to ethical obligations, standards of conduct that establish minimal requirements of ethical citizenship.

- Playing by the rules, obeying the law, and paying all taxes.
- Participating in the democratic process by voting, serving on a jury, reporting crimes, and testifying as a witness.
- Protect the environment by conserving resources and minimizing waste and pollution.
- Being a good citizen and a good neighbour.
- Care about and pursue the common good.
- Be a volunteer – help your school and community be better, cleaner and safer.
- Participating, voting, sharing your opinion, serving on committees, reporting wrongdoing, and paying taxes.

VI. TRUSTWORTHINESS:

- Integrity** = “wholeness”, predictable, consistent in thoughts, words, and actions, not “two faced”.
- Honesty** = sincerity, real, not hypocritical.
- Promise keeping** = accountable to promises that have been made.
- Loyalty** = benefit of the doubt to those who you have a relationship with.

□ **Sincerity** = not trying to trap or make fun of others honest feelings. Essential for meaningful personal relationships that are rewarding and enduring successful associations in school, social activities and workplace.

CHARACTER FORMATION IN THE LIGHT OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Modern society is characterized by fast life style, weak family bonding, increased aspiration and less emphasis on morality. In today's materialistic world everyone is unsatisfied. Man becomes slave of his greed. But greed, impatience leads to stress and then the search for peace of mind and soul starts. The troubled world is caught up in a whirl of conflicting values whereas the teachings of the Vivekananda are useful for identifying the objective of our life and also help to achieve the same. It does not preach to give up the life but living life in a regulated manner. It's entire spiritual instructions are for building character.

A person of good character is never dependent. An ideal person is entirely independent, capable, eligible and entitled. Here, plenty of precious material for building great character. Now let the architect use his imagination, will, energy and enthusiasm to build that magnificent structure of life which is called Character. So, Vivekananda taught —*'Be and make. Let this be our motto* (CW.IV, 351).'. The physical environment much influences on character. There are some other factors which influence the growth of character:- (1) strength of will and habit of self control, (2) proper estimate of duty and a wider conception of the moral ideal, (3) habit of regular performance of the duties of life, (4) rational power and (5) Sincerity and earnestness in very work. Lack of these factors may degenerate the character of an individual (Sanyal, 2004, p.157). Swami Vivekananda realized three necessary things to make every man great, every nation great (VIII.299):

- Conviction of the powers of goodness.
- Absence of jealousy and suspicion.
- Helping all who are trying to be and do good.

Swami Vivekananda suggested to try to give up jealousy and conceit and learn to work united for others. He told, purity, patience and perseverance overcome all obstacles. He suggested to take courage and work on. Patience and steady work, according to Swami Vivekananda, this is the only way to get success.

Man-Making Education implies that education should build character. Character is the foundation for self development. Education is an instrument for human betterment. The basis of all systems social or political rest upon the goodness of man. No nation is greater or

good because if parliament enacts this or that, but because, its men are great and good. That is why, Swami Vivekananda stresses on character formation in Man-Making process. Further he wants to strengthen the mind and expand the intellect of the child through education. This is because he believes that character, strong mind and sharp intellect prepare the child for better life. He further says, "if you really want to judge the character of man, look not at his great performances watch a man do his most common actions. Those are indeed the things which will tell you about the real character of other great men". Therefore, character development is the first aim of Man-Making.

According to Swami Vivekananda the following things are required for Character Formation:

- **Hard work:**

Work is worship. In Swamiji's insightful words: "Karma in its effect on character is the most tremendous power that man has to deal with. Man, as it were, is a centre, and is attracting all the powers of the universe, towards himself. Good and bad, misery and happiness, all are running towards him and clinging round him, and out of them he fashions the mighty stream of tendencies called character and throws it outwards." Character formation is possible only through hard work. While living in all types of comforts and avoiding all types of labour, by living a life of inactivity and laziness no one can build up good character. Life is not a bad of roses. Struggle is the best way of character building. Vivekananda said, "*Pay as much attention to means as to the end*" (II.1).

- **Gurukula System:**

The teacher should present high ideals before the student. The best way to develop character of the students is only by the personal example of the teacher. Swami Vivekananda says "without the personal life of the teacher there would be no education. One would live from his very boyhood with one whose character is like a blazing fire, and should have before him a living example of the highest teaching" (Swami Vivekananda, 1976, p. 57). As close and intimate interaction between teacher and taught has been emphasized in ancient Gurukul system of education, Vivekananda feels that Gurukul Parampara (i.e., close contact of student with teacher) is also a sound method of education which helps the learner to develop many noble qualities as well as knowledge (Nayak, 2009).

- **Formation of Good Habits:**

Character is intimately connected with habits. Good

habits make for good character. Good habits are nothing but character. Modern Psychology accepts the value of habits in one life and it shapes the behavior of the individual. Swami Vivekananda has pointed out the value of habits not only in the present life but also in lives to come.

- **Moral and Spiritual Values:**

Formation of character requires traits such as purity, thirst for knowledge, perseverance, faith, humility, and obedience; respecting the elders etc. These qualities are learnt by the teachers' example and pupils' earnestness. According to Vivekananda, "*Shradhaban labhate jyanam*". In this context, Rabindranath Tagore also supports this by saying "*Amar Matha Nata kare dao he tumar charan dhular tale*".

- **Learning through Mistakes:**

Practice makes a man perfect. Practice / exercise will help in character formation. The student should be allowed to commit mistakes in the process of character formation. He will learn much by his mistakes. The progress requires courage and strong will. Strong will is the sign of great character, which will make men great. Failures/ mistakes are the stepping stones of our progress in character. Modern Psychologists are accepting the value of Mistakes / errors.

- **Will Power:**

Self-improvement is almost impossible without the voluntary or involuntary exercise of the will-power. Whereas, given the willpower, we can bring about considerable changes in our individual and also collective lives for the better, from very hopeless situations. Given the will-power, man makes everything out of nothing as it were. In the absence of the will-power, all his talents and qualities and endowments come to nothing. Strong will is the sign of great character, through which one can progress.

- **Observance of Contenance (Brahmacharya):**

According to Swamiji character development is a very important aim of any education. For this, he emphasized the practice of Brahmacharya which fosters development of mental, moral and spiritual powers leading to purity of thoughts, words and deeds. Brahmacharya or abstinence is the first means of achieving concentration. It bestows psychological and spiritual powers to the student. It transforms sexual drive in to spiritual force. Brahmacharya also implies purity of thought, deed and

action. Brahmacharya improves and sharpens various Psychological processes such as learning, remembering and thinking. Swami Vivekananda therefore strongly emphasized the need for the student to observe Brahmacharya. It leads to mental and physical development. Firstly it controls distractions. Secondly it improves the body and mind so that they may become effective means of knowledge (Swami Vivekananda, 1976, p. 45).

- **Training the Mind:**

The secret of character-building lies in training the mind. Let us recall the well-known passage about character-building:

*Sow a thought, reap an action.
Sow an action, reap a habit.
Sow a habit, reap your character.
Sow character and reap your destiny.*

Swamiji says: "He who has succeeded in attaching or detaching his mind to or from the centres at will has succeeded in Pratyahara, which means, 'gathering towards,' checking the outgoing powers of the mind, freeing it from the thralldom of the senses. When we can do this, we shall really possess character. . ."

- **Self realization:**

Self realization will help in character formation. Individual should realise his self and try to establish harmony with his self and the Universal self. Self realization is the supreme good of human beings. This supreme good is to be attained through personal efforts. Full development of character will consist in this effort at self realization. All these things are diagrammatically given below (Figure 2).

Swami Vivekananda himself was an ideal teacher. His words worked like magic and inspired millions of people both in India and abroad. Presenting his own example, Vivekananda asked the people to build up their character and manifest their real nature which is the effulgent, the even pure. (Sharma, 2003.)

Vivekananda says "All success in any time of work is the result of concentration. High achievements in arts, music etc., are the result of concentration (VI, p. 37).

CONCLUSION

Though man's character depends, to a large extent, on the physical and social conditions, it is true, no doubt, that personal effort is the most indispensable factor in the formation of character. There is no other way out to

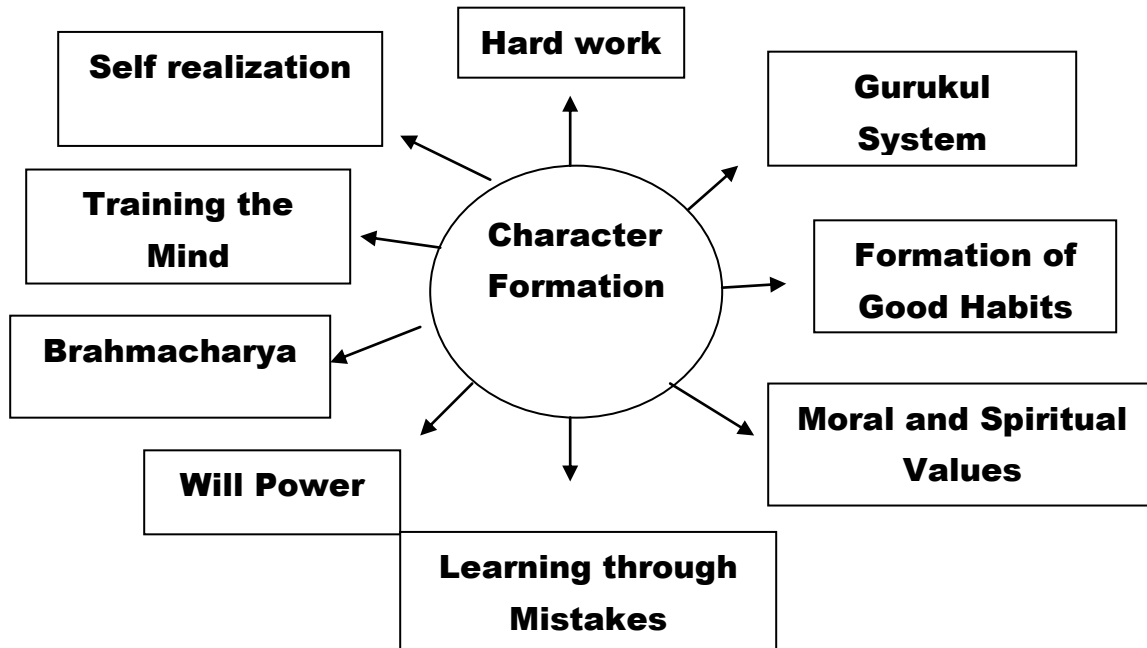


Figure 2. Character Formation

lasting peace and meaning in life except by building character. There are no substitutes. Vivekananda's concept of character formation will very much helpful to the younger generation and the present society. It will help to solve so many problems which are raised in recent time. As the century closes, let us pledge ourselves to the welfare of all. Let us work together to build free and equitable societies where each human being is given the chance and the means to develop his or her potential to the fullest. Let us work hand in hand throughout the voyage to the enjoyment of life by all, in spite of their gender, race, tongue, age and belief. Let us remember the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the whole universe is a family) in ancient Sanskrit literature and Nara Narayana Universal prayers in Vedic Benediction:

*"Let all be happy
Let all be free from diseases
Let all see the auspicious things
Let nobody suffer from grief".*

REFERENCES

- Berkowitz MB (2002). The science of character education. In M. Damon (Ed.), Bringing in a new era in character education, (pp. 43-63). Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press.
- Davis M (2003). What's Wrong with Character Education? *American Journal of Education*. 110 (1), 32-57.
- Joy Rousseau (2003) Character Education Ethical Choices, National Organization Character Counts! www.charactercounts.org
- Kohlberg L, Turiel E (1989). Moral development and moral education. In G. Lesser (Ed.), *Psychology and educational practice*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Person/Scott Foresman.
- Nayak BK (2009) Text Book on Foundation of Education, Cuttack, Kitab Mahal.
- Paiget J (1965). *The Moral Judgment of the Child*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Ryan K, Bohlin KE (1999). *Building Character in Schools: Practical ways to bring moral instruction to life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Sharma GR (2003). Trends in contemporary Indian Philosophy of Education, p. 4.
- Sanyal J (2004). *Guide to Ethics*, Calcutta: Sribhumi Publishing Company, pp.156-157.
- Swami Vivekananda (1976). *India and Her Problems*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, p.45 & 57.

Wiley LS (1998). Comprehensive character-building
Swami Vivekananda Ebook.
<http://www.consciouslivingfoundation.or>. Retrieved 30
March 2012.
Swami Vivekananda (1984). Vol. I. p. 25.
Swami Vivekananda (1984). (Vol.II.1), (III.302), (IV.351),
(IV.358), (V.342), (VI.37), (VII.487) and (VIII. 299).
Wiley LS (1998). Comprehensive character-building
classroom. DeBary, FL: Longwood Communications.

www.character.org.
[www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.ht
m](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.htm)
www.charityathome.org
[www.thepassiveeuthansiaforum.weebly.com/uploads/2/4/
4/8/24489486/760918_orig.gif](http://www.thepassiveeuthansiaforum.weebly.com/uploads/2/4/4/8/24489486/760918_orig.gif)