

Toward the New Education

A talk given by Kirpal Singh in Deradun, India,

at the inauguration of the Manav Kendra Education Scheme

June 21, 1972

Man has been regarded as the crown and glory of this creation. "Not only is man at the origin of development, not only is he its instrument and beneficiary, but above all he must be regarded as its justification and end." *Man*, as Lord Jesus told us, *whom God made in His own image*, should prove a worthy recipient of His blessings. But alas! the man of today has belied most of our expectations. Increasingly, his vanity has led him to regard himself as the center of the world, and made him oblivious of his shortcomings. The education system which could have remedied all ailments and promoted his all round development has proved woefully inadequate. Somehow a student of today is unable to get true knowledge, which could have helped him to acquire the right understanding of life resulting in right thoughts, right speech and right action. In fact, the real aim of education is to develop the character and individuality of a pupil, his mind, will and soul power. The best education is that which teaches us that the end of knowledge is service.

This "service" is another name for love and fellowship, which constitute the very essence of personal and social life. Love and fellowship bring with them peace, gentleness and humility, basic values of life whose significance has been repeatedly stressed by the sages and prophets of India and the world. To nurture these values, to practice them, and to adopt them wholeheartedly in life, is what is known as Spirituality. "Spirituality" is not a name of a few religious dogmas. In fact, there is no room for dogmatic assertion in spiritual life. Once Huen Tsang put a question to Shil Bhadra, the head of the Nalanda University: "What is Knowledge?" He replied, "My child, Knowledge is perception of the principles or laws of life. And the best principle of life is fellow-feeling sharing with others what you have." He says that those who cook food for themselves alone are thieves. Jesus once asked his disciples, "What does it profit a man if he were to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" The voice in them which brought forth the answer, "None, Jesus, none," was the voice of Spirituality. The tenth Guru says, *Those who put food in the mouths of the poor and the needy, they put it in my mouth.*

This capacity to share is known as Spirituality, without which all education is a sheer exercise in futility. As Gentile, a great thinker, says, "A school without a spiritual content is an absurdity." Modern education is largely egocentric and makes men spiritually and socially incompetent; and they enter life with a view to gaining money on earth and applause for their own personal enjoyment, forgetting that the true happiness begins only when one goes out of one's little self the ego and seeks the larger Self.

The most important thing about education is its relation to life. "Knowledge without action is empty as a shadow." "Education is not a withered parchment but the Living Water of the Spirit." The school should be a home of teachers and students who reflect in their studies, and on the playground and in their daily lives, the cherished virtue of humility. Till our knowledge enables us to imbibe the noble things of life, it has not served its purpose. Al-Ghazali, a man of scholarship and meditation, says in his book *Child*, "Know, my child, that knowledge without action is insanity, and the noblest action is service."

The chief malady of current education is that it results in the disassociation of heart and head. It lays emphasis on the development of head, and does sharpen the intellect to some extent. But more essential is the liberation of the heart. That will be done when the reason is awakened in sympathy for the poor, the weak and the needy. Sacrifice grows out of the heart, so the heart is required to be unfolded.

The young should: (i) strive after the ideal of sacrifice and not emotions; (ii) be simple, for simplicity is strength; (iii) learn to cooperate with all, and not let differences in creed or political opinions stand in the way of solidarity; (iv) accept the creative ideal, which regards humanity as one and service as the end of all knowledge. Teachers should train students in the spirit of sympathy and love, blending information with inspiration and knowledge with love. A man may pass university examinations and yet remain ignorant of the realities of life. He may have read a thousand books, yet be no better than a boor. But true education will make him truly cultured; and the soul of culture is courtesy. Scholarship may be proud; culture is humble.

Paradoxically enough, culture and agriculture are similar in many ways. The soul's *Ksbetra* [field] must be cultivated by disciplining desires and emotions. Who could have put it better than Buddha who, while dilating on the analogy, observed, "I plow and sow and grow, and from my plowing and sowing, I reap immortal fruit. My field is religion; the weeds I pick up are passions; my plow is wisdom; my seed is purity." Our Rishis have prayed, *Tamso ma Jyotirgamaya* ("Lead me from darkness to light.")

But this darkness cannot be illumined in just a day. Bricks, mortar, comforts and luxuries cannot give any such training. It is the proper atmosphere which can deliver the goods; that is why emphasis in the school should be on atmosphere more than on rules, textbooks and buildings.

The tender heart of a child calls for very delicate handling. In fact, education begins even before birth and therefore better care must be bestowed upon every pregnant mother. It is a constant association with gentle forces which breeds virtuous persons. A child is the center of creative life. It needs to be opened as a flower is opened, gently, by sympathy, not by force. Do not let the child be imprisoned in the examination machine; never let him be snubbed and scolded.

The fruits of fellowship are four-fold. The first fruit is *Artha*, which indicates the economic aspect of education. The second is *Dharma*, which preaches reverence for law. *Kama* provides for the freer and fuller growth of human beings. The most important is, of course, the fourth fruit, i.e. *Moksha*, the complete liberation. This is liberation from our petty selves, which impels us to shed all our bigotry, narrow-mindedness, and chauvinism. If education does not enable us to raise ourselves from the levels of our ordinary selves, our average minds to heights above our normal vision, it does not fulfill its very purpose. It is a lamentable fact that present education, which should insure an integrated growth of human personality, provides a very incomplete and insufficient preparation for life.

In this process, the situation of the school also plays a major role. The German word *kindergarten* is quite suggestive in this context. *Kinder* means child, and *garten* garden, indicating that every school should be situated in a lovely spot of nature. In ancient India, every Ashram was a garden of nature. The Manav Kendra is situated at a healthy and picturesque spot in the Doon Valley, presenting a glorious and tempting view of the snow-clad peaks of the Himalayas. In the true tradition of Manav Kendra the Man Center it belongs to all mankind for the creation of understanding, peace, and progress. The institution is dedicated to the concrete realization of human unity and is projected as an entirely new concept of integral education and moral living according to the ethics of spirituality. Human body is the true Temple of God. God resides in the temple of the body made by Him in the womb of the mother, and not in the temples made by the hands of man. Without an inner change, man can no longer cope with the all-round development of his life. To accomplish this vital and indispensable tasks, the very nature of education has to be transformed so that it can give society young men and women who are not only intellectually but emotionally trained for vigorous, realistic and constructive leadership. We envisage such an atmosphere where persons will be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls.

The aim is to make it a place where the needs of the spirit and concern for human progress will take precedence over material satisfactions, pleasures and enjoyment. Certainly the education will have to be spiritually oriented and given, not with a new to passing examinations, getting certificates and diplomas, and seeking employment, but for enriching the existing moral, ethical and other faculties and opening up new vistas and horizons to fulfill the dream of Reality.