

Education For Life

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The Purpose of Education

Education is indispensable for the progress and growth of an individual. Education makes a man what he is. Unfortunately, however, formal education is often restricted only to career-making and acquisition of working skills for earning a livelihood. This approach also leads to mushrooming of schools and colleges where the purpose of all activity is only to make the students score high marks or grades, overlooking other aspects of life. The students thus do not know how to face life or solve the problems of life. They end up becoming depressed, confused and anxious, leading to many social and psychological problems.

The real purpose of education should be to create right type of human beings. 'Men, men, these are wanted,' said Swami Vivekananda. Indeed, 'men' or 'women' who are skilled in work and strong in character is what is wanted. How do we achieve it? Through 'man-making' or personality development.

Education and Development

While a nation may be rich in natural resources, it is the human resources that are most important. To have the right kind of humans, or proper 'human resource management', therefore, is vital for a nation's growth and development. This means taking care of the education given to an individual. It is the key to nation-building.

Learning or education starts right when one is in mother's womb. Mother's thoughts and activities shape the growing child. Various researches have confirmed the pre-natal influence on human personality. And as a child, one learns by watching and observing his parents and others around. One learns to co-relate the things that one observes, right or wrong, and thus one's personality begins to develop. Further, formal education and interaction with others develop the individual's personality. Education, however, is much more than formal education. Whole life itself is a learning process. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'As long as I live, I learn.'

Developing the Complete Personality

According to Indian Tradition, human personality has three dimensions—physical, intellectual (and emotional) and spiritual. Education should deal with all the three. Let us briefly understand them:

Physical Dimension: The first dimension of man's personality is his body. It is the physical dimension. It refers to man's physical needs and growth. One should learn how to be physically strong and healthy. Right education should help in developing a strong stamina and healthy habits. Strong physical constitution helps one accept and face challenges of life. One should also learn the importance of right eating habits. Food is the source of energy for physical growth. One

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should also learn the importance of physical exercises and games. They should become part of one's life. Yogasanas and simple forms of pranayama also are of much value in this context.

Intellectual Dimension: Intellectual growth refers to a person's thinking, logical and memory skills. Reading books and articles, watching movies, visiting places and interacting with men of intellectual eminence—all these go a long way in one's intellectual growth. Exposure to healthy literature and a proper approach to learning help develop intellectual faculty. If one is given right direction at the primary level itself, it goes a long way in making one intellectually strong. Lessons in concentration and self-discipline play a key role in developing one's intellect. Along with intellectual development one must develop strength of mind and steadiness of character.

Moral and Spiritual Dimension: Unfortunately, moral dimension is given least attention in modern society. With overemphasis on money-earning and career building, moral training of an individual is awfully neglected. Mere intellectually bright people, without moral and spiritual training, turn out to be a burden and a threat to society.

Morality is the basis of character building. The training in moral principles begins at home, early in life, while the growing child observes and interacts with his parents, siblings, friends and others. But there are many contemporary challenges to this aspect of early training in moral refinement. Changing socio-economic situation keep the parents busy with their profession and personal issues and they leave the whole thing to schooling system which itself lacks in many ways. Added to it is the rise of information technology. Today the world has become small, thanks to instant

communication and information technology. While it has a bright side, there are many darker aspects to it. Easy access to Internet and entertainment has exposed the young minds to all kinds of low, obscene and negative thoughts and they become a prey to many wrong things at an early age.

One of the best ways to check this is that the parents and elders should spend quality time with children and also make them aware of the life-building ideas of great personalities including Swami Vivekananda. The students should be encouraged to read and discuss Swamiji's life and teachings through forming Vivekananda Study Circles. The Study Circles should hold regular reading classes and also encourage the young minds to understand Swamiji's teachings through interactions with knowledgeable persons.

Moral education cannot be given by books only. One needs an example in order to develop faith in moral principles. Hence, the teachers of moral principles should themselves practice what they preach. Values cannot be taught but they can be caught—by observing the life of an exemplary person.

Conclusion

Complete education means harmonious development of all faculties of man—physical, intellectual and spiritual. Swami Vivekananda (CW, 6:49) succinctly placed the ideal of such an education thus:

We want the man whose heart feels intensely the miseries and sorrows of the world. . . And [we want] the man who not only can feel but can find the meaning of things, who delves deeply into the heart of nature and understanding. [We want] the man who will not even stop there, [but] who wants to work out [the feeling and meaning by actual deeds]. Such a combination of head, heart, and hand is what we want.' □