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## **A Significant Commonality among Self Directed Teachers: A Spiritual Bent of Mind**

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Human Life is a series of activities and education imparted should be such that it prepares the individual definitely and effectively for all the specific activities of life. It is believed, except for the mandatory training for school teachers, the teachers learn through experience the nuances of teaching, but if that alone is the basis, it ultimately limits the development. Because the experiences in just one's own life may not necessary equip a teacher to understand and cater to the batches and batches of students trained by the teacher. Through reflection, inquiry and critical thinking, common traits found among many good teachers, the gap is bridged to certain extent. Apart from these, there is another important trait, which contributes to the making of a great teacher and about which there are umpteen examples from ancient times to the present. Empathy, spiritual bent of mind, a mentoristic approach towards students from the teachers, especially the language teachers, uplifts the quality of education. This article is an earnest attempt to explore the inextricable relationship between a successful teacher and the spiritual bent of mind. To substantiate this I will etch in a few examples and references from various sources.

### **Purpose of the study and its relevance:**

The topic I selected may appear too enthusiastic or unfair. My odyssey started after reading a few biographies of successful teachers, from past to the present, it was so enlivening that I decided to write a full paper on this. It is not only interesting but also advantageous to study about the roots which nourish the giant tree. Perhaps with our focused practice we can better understand the pedagogical implications thereof.

### **Introduction:**

On hearing the word "Spiritualism" majority among us would ponder and then wonder- why do we talk of lofty things like spiritualism when we are busy with our run-of-the-mill tasks being a teacher, which is one among the other professions? Where do we have time? And above all do we really need it?

Spiritualism is interpreted in different ways; the two significant ones being the philosophical and the religious point of view. In this paper I would limit myself to considering spirituality a noble trait, working with spirit for an uplifting cause of educating the custodian of future. In any sense I am not equating the usage with any other religious or philosophical connotations attached to this word. Another perspective attached to the word spiritual by me is partly philosophical and moderately religious. It is partly philosophical, as I consider it is an

idealistic truth seeking endeavor and partly religious for its concern being sacredness, piousness and devout attention attached to teaching profession in our culture.

Irrespective of the circumstances teachers shall stand the test, pursue divinity, follow righteousness and aspire for higher endowments of the mind. Here my concern is how teacher can control and harness the power of human will and transform the society in dual way 1) self realization and 2) shaping the youth.

In the words of Philip Sheldrake, Spirituality is referred to as the “deepest values and meanings by which people live”. (Sheldrake, p. 1-2)

It would be a great mistake to consider teaching as just a profession. Even though we earn remuneration for our work it is not a mere profession. We are workers of an elite community, who strive for the societal upliftment. We are class apart from other workers and even the fatality of harm done is massive as if we fail to produce the right “goods” or “things” the loss is invaluable. It is our mission to see to it that we realize the desired end by applying our knowledge, ability and skills. If we are successful it will not only be of use in the present but also the future.

In “Siksar Herfer” Rabindranath Tagore states the objective of education is to give life, strength, and health and ability to introspect. In another essay titled “A Poet’s School” he further develops this theme, stressing the importance of inculcating empathetic nature in children not only with fellow beings but also with the nature. He writes: “We have come to this world to accept it, not merely to know it. We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fullness by sympathy. The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence. But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, it is severely repressed.” (Tagore p.116)

The best part of this profession is we deal with young minds in an attempt to instill quality education and learning for life. We are gifted not only to shape their career but also their character. It is an honour being entrusted with the noble task of honing the young minds. We as teachers share equal responsibility with the parents in nurturing the balanced development of mental and moral capabilities of the child. Another reason contributing for the uniqueness of this profession is we remain in touch with books, in order to keep our-self abreast, throughout. This helps us remain burnished all time because for teachers intellectual development is not a choice or secondary. For all these reasons the material rewards that teaching fetches is marginal when compared to the satisfaction quotient it yields. To accomplish this one must have ardent devotion and religious attachment to the profession, and can be achieved to the fullest only with the spiritual bent of mind.

According to great seers and sages of the world the ultimate aim of education should be carving out the holistic and virtuous individual for the upliftment mankind, at the highest level. For this good ethical character and conduct complemented with the practical application of reason for righteousness’ sake is imminent. Not getting swerved from the right

path in the face of difficulties is the essence of true education. Socrates thought of himself as a midwife. In the *Theaetetus*, he says, “these are the pangs of labour, my dear Theaetetus; you have something within you which you are bringing to the birth.” Unless a teacher pursues it with divine fervour, he/she will not be successful to bring out the latent potential of the taught.

Let us look at Swami Vivekananda explanation about what is education:

“What is education? Is it book learning? No. Is it diverse knowledge? Not even that. The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful is called education. Now consider is that education as a result of which the will, being continuously choked by force through generations, is now well-nigh killed out; is that education under whose sway even the old ideas let alone new ones, are disappearing one by one; is that education which is slowly making a man a machine?” (CW p.490)

The intrinsic traits play a dominant role in determining the nature of an individual. Qualities like compassion, honesty, truthfulness, individuality, self esteem etc are the ones found commonly in good individuals. When they are endowed with such positive traits they are successful in dealing with positively majority of the testing times in life. Teaching professionals are required to possess the afore-mentioned qualities in abundance to become successful in their profession. The demands of this profession are different when compared to other professions, so as to stress once again.

The four main sources in inculcating values in children are home, school, media and society. It will not be extreme to say all the four are failing to provide the nourishment for imbibing the right values. Society and family, because of the LPG (Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization) are in a state of flux; media I don't think I need to elaborate what kind of effect it has on the society; and the education system as well is commercialized, with hardly a handful attempting to bring harmony and order in chaos.

It is not that most of the parents are not trained to teach and collaborate with their ward; but they hardly spare time for their ward. They are busy procuring the aids and amenities to elevate the life of the child and in the process ignore imbibing the basic value orientations and positive traits. In the cut-throat competition the child is mislead, and lost. It is rightly observed that “The obsession with academic achievement in an ambience of hyper competition reduces the parent-child interaction to a bare functional minimum. Children are forced to live in academic incubators, out of touch with reality and uninvolved with the flow of life around them.” (PP. p.27)

On the other hand if the freedom given is unrestricted and unlimited, because of the momentous aspects of the modern society, the hazards are many fold. This is endorsed way back in 1996, by the Kothari Commission on Education:

“Modernization aims, amongst other things, at creating an economy of plenty, which will offer to every individual a larger way of life and a wider variety of choices. While this freedom to choose has its own advantages, it also means that the future of society will depend increasingly upon the type of choice each individual makes. This will naturally depend upon his motivation and sense of values, for he might make the choice either with reference entirely to his own personal satisfaction or in a spirit of service to the community and of furthering the common good. The expanding knowledge and the growing power which modernization places at the disposal of society must, therefore, be combined with the strengthening and deepening of the sense of social responsibility and keener appreciation of moral and spiritual values.” (Goyal. P.28)

In cognizance of these facts now it is up to us, the teachers, to consider what is in our hands? In this situation the teachers have to bridge the gap (gaps). Inter generation communication gap and the pursuit of values in the face of media exposure is difficult but not impossible for the teaching community. Educational ideals advocated by likes of Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore have to be embraced by the teachers as tenets and dictums. Some of them not even teachers by profession are revered, the reason being the lasting impression they had on the young minds because of their persona as an ideal individual. If they could have such profound influence even till date, it is all the more required to follow their principles, with moderation to make it viable.

It is interesting to study, what makes the difference between teachers, good teachers and great teachers? Some teachers take up teaching only as a source to make livelihood. They neither have sense or sensibility of the nobility associated with this profession. These kind of teachers are they themselves a prey to the vanities of life. By and large they have lost the grip on life; they admire neither right thinking nor deep thinking but free thinking. They belong, with due apologies, to high-class and low touch category. Unless they introspect and aspire earnestly they will do more harm than good to society by continuing in teaching profession. There are some others who though are aware of the responsibility, are bound from realizing them because of their circumstance driven life. This category of teachers needs little effort to become great teachers. Their weak will is the culprit, and if we as teachers have not learnt how to develop will-power early in life, we shall do so because self improvement is impossible without the voluntary attempt and exercise of will power. Once we possess the will power, we start believing our self, our ideals, our values etc. and this facilitates the transmission of core qualities in the students.

A few teachers are blessing of God to the society, who instill righteousness and self esteem, kindling the noble values in their taught. They transform the society and command love and respect from all alike. The garland of glory is bestowed upon them eternally. They are praised and lauded for being instrumental in inspiring students by the best approach i.e. with personal example. The power to inspire comes from their own personality and their ability to

practice what they teach or teach through practice. They rose to that great height through moral values, which are a means for spiritual enlightenment. This spiritual bent of mind signifies an elevation and expansion well deserving to be emulated as the role models.

**Conclusion:**

We, the teachers, enjoy the trust and reverence of the society and it should be preserved and capitalized. It is said it takes a few committed people to create a strong impact. According to Swami Vivekananda:

“The history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves. That faith calls out the divinity within.” (CW p.228)

Why not let that impact be from the teaching fraternity? Let us all aspire to be the torch bearers to the society. This article is dedicated to all the teachers who, directly or indirectly, have instilled positive outlook in me.

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