

THERE IS EDUCATION AND EDUCATION

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Aristotle, the Greek philosopher wrote: "The fate of the empires depend on the education of youth." Philosophers, politicians, historians feel that education is the solution to man's problems. There is hardly anyone who will not realize the importance and value of learning. Is it any wonder then, that education has been called the "Engine of society?"

Yet, in today's Western system of education there is a 'missing dimension'. When we refer to education, we often associate it with schools, colleges, universities, degrees, diplomas and most of all, with financial success. But is this the kind of education that guides us to a happy productive life or leads us to our spiritual advancement? TRUE EDUCATION demands more than just acquiring informative worldly knowledge or earning money. It requires and involves careful and continuous learning of VALUES, the conquering of our negative nature to become better humans, developing spiritual awareness of our existence on earth, and an understanding respect and obedience of the Natural Laws of the Universe - knowledge accompanied by wisdom, acquired in a spirit of humility. As **Albert Einstein** has said: "It is essential that the student acquire an understanding of, and a lively feeling for values of the morally good. Otherwise he with his specialized knowledge, more closely resembles a well-trained dog than a harmoniously developed person." **Thomas Huxley** observes: "Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, **whether you like it or not.**" Is this what we are teaching our children?

Education begins at birth. The Home is the primary source of education. My experience as a pre-school teacher/director in this country for several years, helps me to paint a scenario of the typical parent-child relationship: Parents busy working, children out of the house most of the waking hours at the mercy of babysitters, too many material things given too easily, lack of discipline due to guilt feelings. As a result, the child feels insecure, develops behavior problems, grows up lacking self-control, in a materially flourishing but a morally bankrupt society.

There was a time when parents, especially mothers, spent a lot of time with their children, read to them, pointed out the right and the wrong, and did not hesitate to discipline the child if found necessary. "He who loves him, disciplines him promptly." At present the children are exposed to TV which provides cheap excitement, violence, sex every minute of their viewing. They are being robbed of their innocence during their most enjoyable age childhood!

"Train up a child in the way he should go and even when he is old, he will not depart from it." Training for life is not just mental or physical; it is more of guidance in the spiritual matters. Parents must set up standards based on **God's Word** and maintain them by constant reinforcement and correction whenever necessary. When the child grows older, we need to make him aware of his life, his duty towards his family and fellowmen, the dictates of his Religion and all other VALUES. Does the present system of education include all that? Modern education cannot even talk about God without violating individual rights of belief. We can no longer discipline the child without feeling guilty or having to cover up for his undesirable behavior!

Dr. Ernest Boyer, a former U.S. Commissioner of Education has said: "After visiting high schools from coast to coast, we are left with the distinct impression that high schools lack a clear and vital mission.... They seem unable to put it all together. The institution is adrift."

An American thought-provoking magazine THE PLAIN TRUTH writes:

"Today's American high schools often do look more like crisis centers than educational institutions. Some are wrecked with social pathology - pregnant teenage girls, gang-related killings and injuries, troubled and suicidal teens, drug use and dope peddling on school grounds."

Moving on to higher education.... A description of the dormitory life of a large university might go something like this: "Messy living conditions, loud music and noises from stereos and parties at unseemly times, nearly unrestricted sexual cohabitation, alcohol and drug abuse. Most regulations are not followed. If there is an attempt to enforce rules, students say, "This college needs to get out of the Dark Ages. Is this the Inquisition or what?" Unrestricted conduct may seem right to many students. After all, we cannot violate "students' rights" - can we?"

If today's Western society is the product of its education and if such is the end result, isn't there something wrong and missing with our system? This is a question we Zoroastrians have to ask ourselves. We get so enamored of the Western education and obsessed with the academic success it offers, we do not realize what price we pay, **when we stake our all** for that kind of success. "Many a man gets to the top of the ladder and then finds out it has been leaning against the wrong wall." There is more to life than a university degree or augmenting one's bank account!

What, then, is wrong with the Western system of education? **It is the foundation.** The whole structure is based upon the shakiest of foundations- HUMAN REASONING; what is the 'missing dimension'? THE WORD OF GOD - Spiritual knowledge – the purpose and meaning of life - the acceptance of the authority of God in our lives.

There is something wrong in our thinking. Why? Some of the modern philosophers like Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud, who thought they knew better than God, have changed and greatly influenced Western thinking, to such an extent that many question the relevance of even the Ten Commandments. A false standard, wrong priorities, self-indulgence dominate in today's Western Society. There is an excuse and justification for every wrong action. Times may change, but the Universal Laws are for all times. Without moral standards to guide us as a compass, we may get lost in the sea of Life! "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

Western attempts to come to grips with the problems of Life are thwarted because these are essentially spiritual in nature, and they are not taught spirituality. It is the spiritual knowledge that teaches man to be humble, respectful, obedient; and as he enters and progresses deeper and deeper, he acquires realization in the true sense of the term, his smallness, his limitations in the vast expanse of Nature and its bounty. But the colossal system of Western education fails to teach this most important lesson.

All this does not mean that we underrate the importance of academic proficiency, technical training or learning trade to earn money. All I wish to stress upon is that these have to be built upon and accompanied by the basic textbooks – the Holy Scriptures of the different Religions. "Knowledge for the sake of knowledge, has produced amazing technical advantages. But without character, that technology has resulted in marvelous weapons of mass destruction with sophisticated delivery systems. It has resulted in global environment poisoning from toxic waste. Without the restraint of godly character to govern how it is used, the continued advance of human knowledge is serving only to make our world an increasingly more dangerous and frightful place to live in."

It is like we say "Bhanya pun ganya naheen.

Coming to us, Zoroastrians of the Western world, (I will not comment upon those educated in India as I do not know what their educational system is like at present) we should be honest with ourselves and answer to this: Are we not affected by the winds of western thought and by those very elements, the Westerners themselves are complaining about, (may be to a lesser degree than our American friends)? Our kids may be well behaved compared to the others in school; they may shine academically; can operate computers, study technology, excel in sports or music, but how advanced are they in their knowledge of religion, prayers, communal practices, loyalty, history, pride of ancestry, their role in the family and society? Do they have the same degree of virtues as our parents as children once possessed: high ethical standard, obedience, respect for elders, modesty, self-control and such?

This is a question each of us should answer to ourselves. If you feel I am imagining or even exaggerating, read what **Professor John Hinnells**, (a very ardent admirer and a well-wisher of Zoroastrians for decades), has written about us regarding his observations of worldwide statistics on Zoroastrians:

"If a person has had his or her education in the West - does it affect their Zoroastrian heritage? The answer seems to be unequivocally 'yes'. Table 7 lists the figures obtained by taking out of the global sample those who had their primary education in the West and then compares the results with the overall sample. The results are striking. Those educated in western schools do not keep in as close touch with fellow Zoroastrians as the rest either by letter to co-religionists overseas or with those in this country. Nor do they read as much Zoroastrian literature. The implication is that their education distances them from their religious roots. The consequences for religious practice are marked. The western educated pray less often; the prayers they offer are less traditional and they do not wear the sudre/kusti as regularly. Turning to beliefs: they are more open to intermarriage and less inclined to believe in any aspect of the afterlife, either the immortality of the soul, reincarnation, heaven and hell or prayers for the dead." We have now forgotten the language that we all spoke some time ago. We are so anxious that our children learn (as a second language) Spanish, German, or French; but have we ever tried to teach them Gujarati or Farsi? How many of our kids can speak Gujarati leave aside read or write? As Prof. Hinnells observes:

"Again the consequences for the practice of the religion are noticeable: the 'English speakers' (rather loose short hand since those whose mother tongue is Gujarati also speak English) pray less, do not use the traditional form of prayer and wear sudre/kusti less often. As far the perpetuation of the religion is concerned the 'English speakers' do not teach their children the prayers so often and more commonly assert they will not be doing so in the future, nor are they so committed to having their children's naujote performed. They more commonly do not advise their children to wear the sudre/kusti and consequently the children of the 'English speakers' wear it less frequently than do the children of the global sample. After all that it is not surprising that a higher proportion of the 'English speakers' say they are non-practising."

He goes on....

"I honestly believe that Zoroastrianism is under greater threat now than at any other time in its history. Persecutions have rarely removed such a high proportion of your total population as dispersion and the dramatic decline in the birth rate are doing. Oppression has rarely resulted in such a high percentage forsaking their traditions as acculturation and the seductions of western materialism are now causing. It is an insidious danger you now face - but it is no less real for that."

It is time that we heed the danger signals and change - not our Religion but our thinking, that we weed out the undesirable, and sow the good old seeds of idealism and ethics and get down to principles. Let us look back and find out what kind of Education our ancestors had.

Traditional Zoroastrians in Iran used to believe that a person's nature was influenced by the following: a) the seed (tokhm) of his father; b) the substance that sustained his mother's foetus; c) the mother's milk that he had as an infant; d) "Vasna" or the magnetic exchange he has had with things and persons that he has been contact with continuously. "Vasna" would include the contact with his people, his environment and the EDUCATION AND TRAINING he has had. He will partly be what his education has made him; hence the importance of the right kind of education.

There is hardly anyone who will hold something against knowledge. It is not knowledge, but the system of education that may be faulty. **Hence there is education and education.** One may lead to the souls' advancement, yet the other retard its progress - like the one devoid of religious training or spiritual values. Now who determines which values to learn and who has the authority to teach them? These are all revealed in our Holy Scriptures. The words of God are conveyed to us through our Prophet, Raenidars, Soshyants and Holy Saints. Thinkers, philosophers and rationalists do not and cannot convey His message. Their messages are mere opinions or conjectures coming from human minds (which have limitations). These opinions may not be facts or verities or realities in nature. Besides, they all differ in their opinions. Whereas TRUTH is one and remains stable for all times. Our forefathers held on to these values for generations without doubt or arguments, and led exemplary lives as thorough Zoroastrians. Some of them even went abroad to study in the Western Countries, but they never gave up their religious principles or diluted their religious fervour or thought that there was a need to change.

In very ancient times, it is said that in Iran, a boy from his very young age was taught three things: 1) To tell the truth 2) To ride a horse 3) To use bow and arrow (Archery). There was a difference in the way the two sexes were educated. Physical or worldly knowledge given was only about 15% - the rest was spiritual knowledge and yet they grew up successful. Do you think we lead better or more successful lives?

In present times we are concerned mostly with our material welfare. We measure our success in terms of attainment of wealth, false show and fame. But is this true success? Even movie-stars have power, money and fame. It is an all-round welfare: physical, social, moral, mental and spiritual that constitutes real welfare of a person or a community. Only when all these five orders flourish together, there is 'ABADI' and advancement.

In Pazend Setayesh it is advised: - "Bey vesh khastey kushesh makooneed".

"Do not spend all your time amassing wealth because you will not have enough time to serve your Lord. Instead, strive to collect good deeds which will help you not only in your lifetime, but also after your soul has left the mortal frame. The wealth and the fame you will have acquired on this earth will be of no use to you afterwards; nobody has been able to carry these with him into the other world and nobody lives here forever."

Our- beloved Paegambar Saheb has shown us three natural laws with which to test or measure any word, thought or action. Let us examine what they are and try to apply them to our present system of education and see where it stands.

(a) **Mehroob-Bin-Tabey** in a loose sense means... unnatural, artificial, which has no basis of truth in Nature. When we start any movement or organization based on our logic or

common sense, which has no bearing or truth in Nature, that idea (though not intentionally erroneous) will not succeed and fall apart because it has no factual foundation in Nature. Such an idea may succeed in the beginning though (as Ganamino is overpowered by Spenamino only later) but will soon show its natural results (consequences). In Hormuzd Yasht, a question is asked: Will an Asho (pious) person overpower a darvand? Here Darvand does not mean non-Zoroastrian - means non-pious or irreligious - one who does not obey the Laws of Ashoi. It is answered: Ashve vanat drajem, Ashve vanat Dravatatem meaning an 'asho' man will surely overpower a dravand."

(b) **Galeb-Bin- Tabey** would in a very broad sense mean going against Nature intentionally. Experimenting, wasting of the natural elements, destroying, manipulation of the elements by Art or Science, "Raping of the Earth", as they say, would be a few examples.

(c) **Magloob-Bin-Tabey** - Any action or movement that goes parallel to Nature based upon constructive principle, does not disturb Nature. It supports and helps the Natural order, hence is known as Spenamino's Light.

(d) Today's Western system of education may come under the first two. If it is just an accumulation of knowledge for the sake of developing, (KUVVAT-E-ZAR) - (the strength to earn money) it falls under the first one because one does something unknowingly; but if one crosses the limits and goes against Nature, thus creating disorder and a spiritual darkness, through the Manipulation of Art or Science, then it falls under the second rule.

(e) In a nutshell, for every thought word or deed we have to ask ourselves: Does it go against or parallel to Nature?

(f) How does one know which of the three categories a thought, word or deed belongs to?

(Dini Avaz OCT. – DEC. 2004 - Vol. 29; No.4)