

Education for Intellect and Soul

by Satyanarayana Dasa

There's an expression "the child is father to the man." It simply means that, since a child grows to be a man or woman, what is inside a child's mind will be inside the adult's mind. To make a good "father" out of a child, however, the man must give the child a proper education. Otherwise, the child will remain uncultured and may become a source of trouble for society.

A society is judged by the level of its education, not by its gross domestic product (GDP). Its real wealth is education, upon which all other wealth depends. The so-called poorer nations do not always lack natural resources, but they do lack proper education. One of the major distinctions between rich countries and poor countries is their level of education.

Complete Education

While lack of education has negative consequences, the lack of a *complete* education is not much help either. An education that simply equips one to get a job is not a "complete" education. To contribute to society, one also needs education about the values of life. A child without such an education is like a flower without fragrance. If a boy is young, handsome and born to a high class, rich family, but not educated in values, what good can be expected from him?

All supposedly positive attributes, such as beauty, power, wealth, or high lineage, become sources of misery if not accompanied by a good education. For example, every day there are newspaper stories about "white collar crime." These are crimes committed by the affluent class, not by uneducated people. In fact, these people, judging by their apparent economic status, do not need to engage in such crimes. They have enough money, power and status. So why do they engage in criminal activities? Because they are not educated in the higher principles of life. Education has enriched their intellect, but not their souls. They have been educated in the importance of money, but nothing beyond that.

In the USA, in a recent widely publicized trial, Bernard Madoff, a wealthy stockbroker businessman, was sentenced to 150 years in prison and \$170 billion in restitution payments after pleading guilty to 11 federal felonies. As a result of his crimes, dozens of people, including many elderly men and women, as well as many charities, lost hundreds of billions of dollars. Even though he had amassed great personal wealth, he will not be able to enjoy it. This is a natural occurrence for a person who is not educated in values and philosophy.

Two Types of Education

Long ago, there was a king in India whose name was Yayati. He was young, had the most beautiful queens, and enjoyed many luxuries of a royal lifestyle. After a long and fruitful life, however, he concluded, that, if a person's mind is not balanced and content, all the wealth,

grains, cattle and women of the world are not sufficient to satisfy it. This is a very profound realization, and we can learn a lot from it. There is no need to repeat Yayati's experience to arrive at such a conclusion nor to be little Madoffs gathering more wealth by cheating others, just to attempt to enjoy life.

The Upanishads (Vedic literature) declare that there are two types of education. *Para vidya*, or "superior knowledge," is transcendental knowledge that leads to supreme wisdom and eternal bliss. *Apara vidya*, or "inferior knowledge," on the other hand, is secular or intellectual knowledge that merely leads to a career and helps us to enhance our vision of the outer world.

Para vidya is superior, because wisdom is eternal, while knowledge is mainly informative and, therefore, temporary and subject to change.

The Upanishads recommend that a child be given both the superior and inferior types of education. Education that provides only *apara vidya* is only half the job. A child needs *para vidya* to explain the principles and purpose of life. Without *para vidya*, a person can be compared to a donkey that carries a burden on its back the whole day in exchange for just a handful of grass to eat. Because an inferior education only trains one to earn money, one spends a lot of time and energy just to acquire money for the sake of surviving in society. That kind of lifestyle invites a host of health-related and stress-related issues along the way!

Uprooting the Root Cause of the Problems

One may rightly ask, "What is the usefulness of *para* education? The whole world is in the grip of economic fever now, and *para* education will not solve our economic problems." My reply to all such people is: "Yes, it will."

The lack of *para* education has led us to the mess we are in. We will only come out of it with the help of a complete education (that is, with the amalgamation of *para vidya* and *apara vidya*, as recommended by the Upanishads). Only when the population has a complete education can society function properly.

The lack of *para* education is causing the general feeling of insecurity and fear all around. Other products include the economic slump, terrorism, crimes, rapes, exploitation, wars, divorces, drug trafficking, AIDS, global warming, environmental pollution and even swine flu. These will *not* go away unless their root cause is understood and uprooted.

The Solution

The solution, therefore, lies in *para* education. The Hitopadesha (an ancient Indian book of wisdom by Narayana Pandita) rightly says that those parents who do not provide *para* education to their children are their children's enemies. Ironically, these parents are also their own enemies, because "the child is the father of man"!