

Institutional Education

From the SOUNDS OF LOVE series

I am happy to get this opportunity to share some of my Eastern and Oriental thoughts on a subject which is of great importance all around the world and that is the subject of education. Particularly, institutionalized education, or education in regular institutions like schools, colleges, universities. Sometimes people do not understand that there is a different aspect of education that is given prominence in the Eastern society compared to the one that is done in the Western society.

In the East, education is considered something that keeps on going even when a student is not actually in the classroom. The classroom education is considered to be something of an academic course of learning, of acquiring information, of getting knowledge of facts and numbers, not so much getting educated into a personality that has real knowledge, wisdom, experience, the applicability of wisdom to every day life. Those things that come by real education are not considered to be developed mainly in the classroom of an institution.

The Indian emphasis, or the emphasis in Eastern society, generally including the Japanese, Chinese, mid-east countries, has been on a special personal relationship between the student and the teacher. In India we call it the guru-chela relationship. The guru standing for the teacher and the chela for the taught, the student. It has also got some spiritual ramifications because the guru was traditionally not only a teacher of knowledge of this world but also a teacher of the higher knowledge which prepared one for the life beyond this human life. Therefore, the educational process in the East was very much tuned in into the development of spiritual values or higher values that exist even outside the known physical laws of this universe.

What is the basic difference in the institutional educational system that we observe in the West and the traditional educational system that we can read about, learn about, from the East? The basic difference is not in the type of institutions that one sets up, it is not even the type of buildings or classrooms that are utilized, it is in the approach to education itself. In the Western institutional process, the emphasis is on the sharpening of the human mind, of improving the skills of logic and reason, of making a person more adept in using the thought process, of using the process that we call a mental process or a mental activity. This is the main emphasis placed in the Western institutionalized form of education.

On the other hand, in the Eastern system, the emphasis is on building up the inner personality of a person, the inner voice that speaks like the intuitive process that gives information and knowledge suddenly in a flash without involving the thought process, that is not a mental exercise, that is not always logical, but is always more authentic, that has more of wisdom in it than of learning in it. This emphasis would properly belong to the intuitive process rather than the mental process and it highlights the type of education that was imparted by the gurus to the chelas in the East.

Not only is education faulted by being made a mental exercise, it is further faulted by being made an institutional exercise. Even if it was a mental exercise between a teacher and the taught, it would have been much less dangerous than it has become by becoming institutionalized. Institutions ... they tend to build a platform of their own. They tend to set up their own value systems. They tend to create a framework which traps the student as well as the teacher. I have observed that the teachers who work in institutions are not free to teach. They have to teach according to certain norms and according to certain rules laid down by the institutional system.

In fact, institutional systems have grown around those norms and those frameworks and therefore, they restrict even the freedom of the teacher to teach. Therefore, institutional education is even worse than ordinary mental education. At least in a mental education one is always open to question the very process of education. One has the ability to question the very process of the mind that is being employed to educate one. But in the case of the institutional process, one is not allowed to question, except within the bounds laid down by that institution.

Even in some of the best universities you will find that rules and regulations and traditions of that university, of that institution, restrict the freedom of education. They prescribe certain courses. They prescribe the kind of syllabi that has to be observed. They are very, very restrictive in the type of education and learning that can go on in that institution.

What is the purpose of education? Why should we get educated at all? The purpose of education obviously was to prepare the human being for better coping up with life as it comes in the course of day to day events, as it comes from moment to moment. If a person is not able to cope up with their life, what good is that education?

Look at the state of society today. People are educated and they have such a hard time coping up with life. Look at the number of breakdowns in the home that are taking place. Look at the number of suicides. The rate of suicide is increasing. Look at the type of depressions, type of psychological problems, psychiatric problems that are coming up. Where are these problems coming from? They are coming from the very core of people who are educated, who are supposed to be educated. Sometimes we look at people who are comparatively uneducated and we find that they do not have the same problems. Are these then problems created by education? Was education supposed to solve these problems or to create them?

What role is education playing in the social and psychological situation of the human being? Education was supposed to enable the human being to cope with these problems. And now we find that it is instead of coping with those problems, creating more problems for the human being. This would not happen if we had non-institutionalized true education not based merely on sharpening mental skills, but on developing the inner personality, the spiritual personality of a human being. If we gave enough attention to the development of the intuitive process, of the spiritual being of a person, and then called that person educated, perhaps the ability to cope with the problems of life, not only life here, but even life hereafter, would be tremendously increased. That would then be real education.

Real education would be an education where one draws inspiration from the teacher; where the teacher represents the idea; where the student just by being in the presence of the teacher can imbibe some of the values and learnings of the skills the teacher possesses; where the teacher does not have to talk all the time to teach, but by his presence, by his magnetism, by his example, by his non-verbal communications, is able to transmit not only learning, but also the wisdom that he possesses. If that kind of training were to be given to people, you would find they would be better able to cope with the problems of life than they are able to cope up with the systematic institutionalized form of education that we find today.

There are institutions that are supposed to specialize in dealing with problems of life. They are specially designed for people who have problems. Look at the psychological problems that people face and the institutions that are supposed to deal with them. Let us take the example of an expert in psychological matters, or in psychological disorders of human beings, such as the psychiatrist, a trained psychiatrist. I was reading the

other day that the highest suicide rate in this country is among psychiatrists. That means those who are supposed to heal, those who are supposed to teach, those who are supposed to tell their students, their patients, their disciples how to cope with life, are themselves not able to cope with life.

If they are unable to deal with life as it comes, how do you expect that they will be able to imbibe the training and the necessary education that enables their patients and their disciples to cope up with life? Sometimes it is considered that we have not given enough attention to the young people; that there is a generation gap and the older people should not take on the responsibility of educating the young; that the young have new values; and that the young have come a long way from the old traditions and they should be allowed to educate each other. A lot of emphasis is being placed on this system of educating each other and a lot of free time is now given in institutions so that the young people can spend time with each other, teaching each other by association. This is sometimes referred to as the “syndicate system” of education.

Now when you employ the syndicate system of education, you find that the young are groping in the dark and leading others to the same darkness. I read a sad story of a suicide pact in a New Jersey town where four young people committed suicide because they could not cope up with life. And then I read that in the past nine months, a large number of other young people have also committed suicide because they did not know what they were doing in life. I have myself had the opportunity to talk to a lot of young people in this country and one of the problems that bothers them is they do not know where they are going. They do not know what is the purpose of life itself. They do not know why we are here. They do not know what they will do. It looks like they have just to drift along certain set traditional goals, certain set traditional methods of living. They have just to move on. It looks like they have no real purpose in life.

What kind of education will they impart to each other even by association when they are drifting purposelessly even now? Therefore, it would be a mistake to think that people who are blind can lead the blind merely by association; that people who are themselves in the dark can be of any value in the educational system to others who are also in the dark.

One must be enlightened to perform the role of a teacher. One must be enlightened to create the kind of inspiration and to create the kind of impact on another person who seeks enlightenment. The spiritual Masters of the East did precisely that. By associating with these spiritual Masters, the students could get all the inspiration and knowledge that they needed. They did not confine themselves to any specific courses, any specific subjects. Their subject was life. Their subject was the self. Their subject was consciousness. Their subject was how to cope with problems. Their subject was society. Their subject was morality. Their subject was day-to-day decision making. Their subject was mind and spirit. Their subject was intuition and reasoning. Their subjects were the very things that we have to deal with on a day-to-day basis.

They did not confine themselves to any particular subject. The specific subjects the students took up in associating with these Masters were the subjects with which their own lives were concerned. So each student had his own life, his own curricula, his own work to do and the Masters would deal with each case on its own basis, on its own merits, on its own situation. It was not a textbook that could be read out to the whole class and they could get educated. This kind of education by example, by associating with the Master, improved quality of life for all the disciples, gave them happiness, gave them strength, gave them fearlessness, gave them a lot of courage.

One of the weaknesses of the institutional form of education which lays so much emphasis on the development of the mental skills is the increase in the amount of fear and uncertainty in the students. The more you develop

your mind, the more you develop your fear and uncertainty. It looks strange, but it is true. You meet a person, even a young person, who is very clear about what's going on, and then make that person think hard, think over and over again, that person will become uncertain. It is not the thinking process that gives certainty to a person. The wisdom that comes from experience, the wisdom that comes from associating with the wise, is something totally different from merely practicing how to use the skills of logic and reasoning.

Therefore, when you try to develop too much mental skills in young people, they are beset with too many options, too many alternatives, and they see that this could also happen, that could also happen, and, therefore, the young people, instead of getting certainty of what they know and what they can know, begin to falter on uncertainties and the several possibilities that open up to them. In a way it is good that they have several possibilities to explore, but as they keep on exploring, the realm of doubt and the realm of fear also enlarges. It is not possible to take a young man and say, "look, I am opening up all these doors to you and I leave it to you to see which door you want to enter. And I don't tell you what is behind those doors. I don't want to tell you what is there. Go and look out for yourself." And then to expect that young person will not be frightened, will not be uncertain.

This is what institutional education is doing today. It opens up the doors and doesn't tell any more and it wants the student to explore for himself or herself and therefore, fear and uncertainty become a concomitant of this kind of education. Now, if you look at the real everyday problems, the social problems that people are facing, including young people, you will find that most of them arise from doubt and fear. Most of the weaknesses of human beings, which make them lose most of their strength, which makes them feel that they cannot do anything, which makes them feel helpless is because of their doubt and because of their fear.

Doubt is very damaging, not only to the person who doubts, but also to the persons with whom he associates. If a person has a doubting nature, the people that person associates with will also start doubting and will have a different kind of relationship. There can be no love and proximity and closeness between people who have doubt. Therefore, doubt begets doubt and love disappears from their relationship. This is a big price to pay for getting educated in a system that increases doubt.

Similarly, fear can make one so helpless, it takes the entire energy away as if ... as if one cannot cope up with something. One is frightened of things that don't even exist. One is frightened of things that are happening or not happening, fear maybe of things that are not going to happen at all. Supposing somebody's afraid that this may happen, that may happen, something else may happen. If a person like that draws up a list of things one is afraid of, it would run into a long list and yet none of those things happen.

Fear is a way of increasing your anxiety, increasing your helplessness, increasing your weakness. If a person is strong and confident, you put fear in that person, it becomes a different person and becomes helpless. Therefore, fear saps the energy out. Fear saps the personality out. Fear can take the confidence out of a person. Therefore, fear is a very detrimental thing. And we find that doubt breeds fear. And the modern system of education which is based only upon institutions, and building up of the mental process breeds fear and therefore is very detrimental to the personality as a whole.

It has not even been claimed that institutional education can really develop human beings. Today people are even doubting whether it can do so. All that is claimed in favor of institutional education is that it is good for specialist education, specialist research, and specialist investigation. If one wants to investigate in one particular problem in the empirical sciences, one can do very well by going into an institution designed to study that particular science. If one wants to probe the molecule and go into nuclear physics, one can go into a

special institution with all the lab work, all the equipment, to acquire that kind of knowledge and for that, the institutional education is good. One can learn quite a lot of a specific subject for which an institution has been set up.

Therefore, there is a place for institutional education and that is to study only those subjects which require specific study in isolation from the rest of life. Those studies may ultimately benefit human beings, benefit in creating greater creature comforts, benefit in understanding the empirical situation around us, in understanding how we perform, in understanding the physical system, even understanding the psychological and conscious systems. Those studies can be useful as related to studies of specific subjects of specific interest to individuals. But even all these studies put together do not make a person educated in the sense of preparing him to cope up with life. Therefore, even if we have institutional education that gives us all this information, all these different details of how the physical universe is being run, how the human body is being run, how, to the best of our knowledge, human subconscious is being run; even if we have all these details available, they do not come close to the kind of education that makes the human being fearless and free from doubt. Education must be understood not in terms of mere learning or acquiring information, but in terms of acquiring wisdom.

What is the difference between wisdom and education? Wisdom is where we can apply education to day-to-day life. If a person is educated and does not know what to do with that education in day-to-day life, that person is not wise. A wise person is the one who, even with a little education, can apply it to day-to-day life and make the best of it. Institutional education creates these problems of not letting us live our life to the fullest capacity. It does not give us the chance to use the education we have in our day-to-day life. People who are specialists, who have done a lot of work and who have done a lot of research in specific areas, even those persons have not been able to cope up with their life.

In fact, they become so isolated from their own lifestyles and the educational work that they are doing, it looks like the two are quite separate, one from the other. The best way to make use of institutional education is to use it for the specific purpose of exploration and research in certain areas and then leave it to the individuals to get the right kind of education from Masters Who are enlightened, Who have the wisdom to impart that education by personal precept, by personal example to those who are around them. It is only by restoring the intuitive process that goes after such education that we can make a real dent into the human personality and make a person strong, fearless, and capable of facing life. Thank you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeCeIraJ78>

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