

Need for spirituality in holistic education

BRATATI BHATTACHARYYA, SECRETARY GENERAL,
SHIKSHAYATAN FOUNDATION

Enjoy whatever you do and do whatever you enjoy. Human life needs to be fulfilling. This is an understanding that commonly prevails. A basic principle of holistic education is the belief that our lives must be made meaningful. The purpose of life must be greater than the laws described by science, and greater than the consensus consciousness of any one culture. This supreme purpose is a creative, self-guiding energy which we ought to manifest and not attempt to suppress.

I believe creativity is one of the driving forces which is sound and sensible and I like to reflect on my own experience of spirituality.

Although Dharma is at the core of the existence, the self and the surroundings are also taken into consideration. Dharma, therefore, is the primary consideration, unlike the self, as in the practice of well-being according to Western thought.

Well-being in life today

From childhood a boy is convinced to acquire a career which will facilitate the creation and maintenance of his own family and similarly for a girl to nurture the family created with the future husband apart from being educated and having a career. These imperatives flow from the current notion of Dharma (duties) of human beings. On this is imposed the Western framework of self-centric goal-orientation and hedonism which dictates the extent to which life is defined and manifested in material terms.

Western researchers advocate a very structured approach

Photo: Dipjib Bhattacharyya



I am convinced that the primary issue at stake here is the choice between recognizing "a creative, self-guiding energy" or holding on to some self-interested, self-assured ideology or culturally conditioned belief system.

Maslow's concept of 'self-actualizing individual' relied on self-determinism in both identification of self and pursuit of "actualization". The end goal of well-being is the identifying of one's potential and living to the highest degree of utilizing that potential. Hence one must concentrate on purely the individual and also maximization of the "potential" of the individual.

The room of discovering the self-truth and self-responsibility is actually based on individuals' choice and exploration.

Maslow clearly writes that selflessness and transcendence are implicit to the self-actualized person. Therefore, at the highest level, a person is motivated by not merely satisfying one's own needs but also in full utilization of one's capacity to be of use to the 'other' as the need arises. Divine existence, from this perspective, is the ability to go beyond oneself to recognize the needs of those in the social environment.

Philosophy of well being

According to the Indian spiritual tradition, material and spiritual are inseparable, are inter-woven and can be pursued together to attain a holistic life.

The concept of well-being in Indian philosophy goes beyond the Western rationalistic paradigm. In Indian philosophy, well-being is not a separate entity from existence. Well-being is essentially achieved when there is resemblance between Dharma which is the sustaining force of the individual and actions

to self-actualization. Indian thought on well-being disseminates multiple events of self-actualization through a multitude of internal experiences at different points of their journey in life. Self-actualization, according to Indian philosophy, is an incremental process travelling through the various aspects of existence from the mundane to the sublime. This is possible through a proper value system.

I trust, in every aspect of life there is value. When I try to define spirituality then I bring in values that binds a society and nourishes life. Values are indeed the very foundation of a peaceful existence between humans and all of nature. The path for developing values is through Education. Education, however, alone cannot exist without attaining a sense of fairness. Having a balance in life or being fair, this judgement can develop only when academics is combined with culture and spirituality. When Education is combined with a strong value system it makes life soulful. We cannot separate a good value system from day to day life. We have to make spirituality as a part of life.

The majority of the problems we see in today's world are due to an unhealthy attitude. It is important to create a balance between the external and the internal, the body, mind and the soul.

The body is just a product of the food we eat and the mind comprises the impressions we collect from the world. However, the soul descends from beyond. The body is known — material — and the soul is unknown — divine. Existence comprises both the known and the unknown. Without this understanding, life will not be complete. Spiritual understanding

Education and Spirituality

Students are taught values such as love, compassion, patience, forgiveness, etc. This alone will create a deep sense of responsibility towards our fellow human beings, nature and the world as a whole.

Aiming at an academic excellence and opening new avenues for students to perform in the world using their full potential and talents, the institute should also be able to help students to have a better understanding about life from a spiritual point of view.

The purpose of Education cannot be just imparting a lesson and completing syllabus but much more than that. Education must be able to create an atmosphere to help students understand that serving the society with a selfless attitude is also of prime importance apart from material achievement.

Education must be implemented with a passion and emotion.

In these turbulent times, when different ideologies are at loggerheads the world over, creating a crisis of civilization, Education is the path which must show the clarity of thoughts, the empathy of the heart, the purity of the soul and the power of unbridled dreams to benefit society at larger.

A life of material prosperity supported by spiritual goals is very much possible, and this kind of life alone will enable humanity to realize the dream of peace and happiness.

I firmly believe that any centre of excellence must include both Education and Spirituality for the entire world. Recognition and implementation of the spiritual dimension of Education and values should be reflected in a school's mission statement.

Role of Educational Institutions

How do we spread this among students? The idea of nurturing Spirituality must be a part of an educational reform. Teaching as a vocation charts the inner landscape of the teacher on three important paths: intellectual, emotional, and spiritual.

We can define Spirituality in different ways to fulfil the heart's demand to be connected with the bigger aspect of life—a longing that animates love and work, especially the work called "teaching". Teaching and learning can be of any form. Here I am not restricting my teaching only within the boundaries of a school but at any organization be it corporate or any educational institution. It must have spirituality imbibed in it which may include

- To know the inner self.

- To provide balance in life.

- Strengthening our relationships, existence and work.
- Having a sense of humour.
- Finding potential that highlights the "goodness" in people.

- Connecting with nature.
- Listening compassionately to the needs and concerns of others.
- Provide hope and aspiration.

Schools seek to ensure that students are in caring, educative environments which ultimately lead to human growth and fulfilment. Spirituality shapes the actions and directly relate to values and to the ethical behaviour. Values permeate a school community and reflect the organisation of a school.

Role of Educators

All schools ought to include a spiritual dimension — an attention to the sacred. Any Education reform may need to start with the transformed heart of the teacher;

Here we are focusing on the quality of life in schools. As we discuss the relationship between Spirituality and Education, we find out from teachers the following as Spirituality needs to be reflected in a teacher's everyday role.

- Secret of personal and professional journey.
- How does one nurture inner life and spiritual well-being?
- Meeting needs for both solitude and community.
- Strategy to sustain in times of stress and difficulty.
- Enjoying the beauty and wonder of the world in the classrooms.
- Ways to live life as an educator wholeheartedly, with confidence and a deep sense of commitment.
- Motivating students for a sense of hope, connectedness, and community.

Teachers have an obligation to inculcate in their students positive values which reflect sound ethical and moral judgement, as inherent spiritual dimensions of education.

The spirituality of young people can be developed in many ways: for example, by religion, thinking, prayer, meditation and ritual. Spirituality is awakened through feelings of awe and wonder at nature and the universe. For this to occur in schools, teachers need to embed their notion of spirituality in their subject work programmes.

Aesthetics in School

- Beauty in an urban setting can be used to make a strong caring statement by planting flowers and ornamental trees at the school entrance.

- Fresh flowers and framed artwork add an important touch to the teachers' rooms.

- Belongingness: The school students share everything from skits, poetry, and artwork, to dancing, singing, and special jump rope routines. What are your school's traditions and celebrations?

- Peer Mediation: Nurture the spirit by sharing stories. We are all storytellers, with much to share. Students learn from sharing their own stories, and from listening to those of classmates.

- Celebration: The quality and spirit of events reveal a great deal about a school's values and mission.

- Community service: Service to others. Spirituality is about feeling a part of some community, "about being lonely, about being in harmony with mother earth or even feeling a sense of alienation".

Students like to experience the joy, intensity and discipline of both as performers and creators and as members of an attentive audience. When students respond to what they like and don't like they begin to develop a genuine, creative "voice".

However, I believe that there is an equally powerful connection between the spiritual nourishment of teachers and students and the quality of a school's teaching and learning.

An attempt to see Spirituality as indicative of a child's development is not a very common practice. However, the aims of schools and in particular the Goals for Schooling must provide an impetus for further development. There needs to be a commitment, on the part of teachers and leaders, to understand and permeate the spiritual dimensions of education into their respective school cultures to at least make an attempt to reach Maslow's self-actualization. We may connect with a person as one who is at peace with oneself, whose life goals are not built around material success and who has deep personal integrity and often seems completely at home or having "an inner calm".