

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

This time of transition was particularly more difficult for my younger one. It seemed like she was growing up in an environment of constant conflicts. Everyone around her was in their unique world. Often I wondered how she must be processing it all in her tiny mind.

This was another reason for my guilt. As a young first-time mother, I had spent huge amount of quality time with my first-born. But try as I may, it just was not happening the second time. There would always be chores to take care of, conflicts to be resolved, and not to mention my own mood swings and tantrums.

The elder one always demanded more attention and managed to get it by virtue of her more aggressive personality and better vocabulary. I had three people to please and be it entertainment, outing, celebrating or simply steering around the day, Shireen seemed to get the last chance, if ever there was a scope for voting.

And then she was a different child, with an almost opposite personality to that of her elder sister. She hardly had any demands of her own. She found pleasures in small activities and kept herself successfully engaged in creative ventures even in the midst of the chaos.

Rather than feeling good about it, I felt more miserable. Every night I would promise myself to share some 'mom' time with her and the routine of the day would leave me wanting nothing more but to be left alone.

Depression had started to play funny games. I needed warmth and love, unconditional and nothing more, but I would end up rejecting the only source that it would possibly come from – Shireen. She had no conflicts, and things happening around her did not seem to corrupt her at all. All she would be wanting perhaps

was some unconditional love and warmth. And there I was running away from any kind of intimacy in the confusion of my overworked mind and body.

I carried the guilt and all my training in counseling hit me right where it hurt... I was not a good mother. Worse still, on one hand I could not make any positive efforts to get closer to my kids, and on the other, a new fear started filling me up: “One day my kids are going to hate me. They will grow up to detest me and may not like to see me again.”

Guilt + confusion + stress + self-proclaimed theories... what a disastrous combination! And to top it all I still believed that I knew it all.

Then one day, another routine day, something struck me like a realisation. Of course, not by myself; this time it was Shireen who gave me my next lesson.

As I entered the house to the usual chaos and started adding to the already prevalent negativity, Shireen came to me and gave me a tight hug around my waist (that’s how far she could reach). Instantly, without giving it another thought, I pushed her aside and got ready for delivering another tongue-lashing about the littered place.

Without giving me a chance to start off and without giving a thought to my uncaring action, she came around and this time climbed on a nearby chair, threw her tiny arms around my neck and planted the sweetest ever kiss on my cheeks. Then she smiled, jumped down from the chair and ran away cheerfully to join her sister for another fight for the remote.

It felt as if I had experienced a sudden halt in the middle of rush hour traffic and everything around me lapsed into utter silence.

I sat down on the same chair that she had used to reach me and tears rolled down by cheeks. It was love. There was no other word. There was no need for any other

word. I felt it to my core and for those few precious moments my entire being seemed to be flooded by it.

‘Unconditional love’... I had heard it so many times. In fact, one of the pet cliché of our times, that is used more as a style statement than anything else. The books on parenting talked about it. That is what parents were supposed to give to their kids. But do we really? We shower them with love every time they ‘behave good’ (read – behave the way we want). This includes good marks, good manners, good talent... and when they fail to stand up to our standards of ‘being good’, we show them in no unclear ways that we do not love them. Yeah... Yeah... I know... I am a parent too... We always justify that our actions (more often, reactions) are all in good love. But does the child perceive it as love? That is another story. But let me ask you... do you even feel love in your heart when you reprimand the little one for a temper tantrum? I leave the answer to you.

That moment I experienced unconditional, non-demanding love that spelt and meant the same thing: L-O-V-E. My being was drenched and it came out as tears.

And slowly, but surely, I saw myself responding to her and even initiating it and telling both of them ‘I love you’... every chance I could. It took time... years... but I know where it came from. For I had experienced the magic effect of pure love on the most troubled heart, and the effect of expressing it without a reason.

FOLLOW ON

Since that day, till date, when she has some 8-odd years, I have consciously followed her around the chaos and on the not-so-chaotic days. She is the same. She showers all those she loves with hugs and kisses through every weather. Rain or sun is immaterial.

She is growing. Strong in her own way and carries her own opinions and ideas and yet one thing remains constant – unconditional love...

Can I please be blessed with it dear Lord!!

LESSON I LEARNT

Love: It is not about the circumstances, situation, time or the reason. If it is love, IT IS irrespective and pure. Unconditional love is like heavenly showers even on the most parched land. We need to refer to the children frequently to learn this beautiful gift of nature. They are connected to their real nature. They are. They do not dwell into the past or future and hence they are not sullied by the history of people. They live in the present. Their love, just like their anger, is momentary and in response to the moment and hence is unconditional. As parents, we all have experienced this with very young children. When the mother punishes her tiny tots, they run back to no one else but the mother to find solace. This is because they do not know of the blame game and they do not hold anything against the person. They trust fully and they love unconditionally.

And love is what we are all seeking. Every heart craves for pure, non-judgmental, unconditional love, and we often hear dissatisfied souls lamenting about not getting ‘real love’. However, how often are we giving such pure love? This needs some serious introspection. Even as we consider the one relationship that is most precious to us, that with our children, are we able to live in pure love with them? How often do we feel pangs of anger towards them when some other child of the same age scores better, or bags a medal, or misbehaves, or simply spills ice-cream on the new carpet in our kitty circle?

We need to search deeper. We need to open up to seeing ourselves in the light of truth. We want love, we talk of love, we wish to live in love. But are we love?

Our children are. And they know how to live in love. They know how to separate love from everything else and they know the miracles of the healing power of unconditional love. We experience it with them many times over and yet we do not see it. They need love. Our first responsibility as parents is to love. There cannot be better teachers than them.

YOUR TRUTH... MY TRUTH

I remember the first time I experienced trouble in my perfect nest. My high-achieving first-born just decided to give up everything and anything that was afflicted even with the 'A' of Achiever. In fact, she skipped most of the Bs and Cs and slipped down to the Ds.

Now that was a real tough one for an idealist (ME!). I just couldn't figure out what was going on. It did not happen in a day's time of course. First the district-level tennis player decided it was too much of hard work. After seven years of being in the field, she just seemed to have no enthusiasm for it. Getting her up for the practice on time became a nightmare with every passing day.

Then it was the Indian classical dance form Bharatnatyam that she had been trained in for an equal time. She had always received accolades and special reviews for her grace and perfection every time she performed. I would imagine her performing for larger audiences some day. And then she decided that this very elegance on the tag of a traditional dancer was doing all wrong for her 'tomboy' image! So much so that she refrained me from using it in her introduction to any new acquaintance. Down went my dreams... sacrificed to the new emerging Tomboy.

Studies were the easiest to compromise. Reading up the textbooks did not have any charm anyway. But my pride suffered a huge dent to see my topper bringing in the cards with Cs and Ds. Not to mention the total apathy towards practicing for ‘Abacus’ (fast calculations), for which she had received a national ranking.

What was going on? I knew she was talented, I knew she had potential, and I knew how to make her stay on the top. You rightly guessed, ‘I’ knew it, but what did it mean for her?

Well, after a series of verbal duels and ever-increasing stress, I decided to awaken the ‘counselor’ in me. After all, I knew how to handle such stuff! There was a way to modern parenting and it had to be done in a systematic way. Old-time bashing and tongue-lashing was not, according to me, the right psychological approach to get to the kids.

Phew! One bright afternoon, I geared up all my skills and whatever sweetness I could brew up and invited her out for a lunch. We ordered her favourite roasted chicken and then I waited to gather my best.

Finally I decided it was ‘the’ time. Sweetly I started enumerating to her all her past achievements and the accolades that came her way. I went on to remind her of the times she had featured in the local newspapers and the school magazine and created a visual of her during all the glittering ceremonies when she was awarded medals and shields.

Finally, I dropped the Key question that (again – according to ME) was to be the ultimate soul-stirring inspiration for her.

“Sweetheart,” I said, “Don’t you feel bad that there are no more accolades and medals for you? Isn’t it bad that you are not mentioned anywhere in the winners’ columns? Doesn’t it hurt?”

After what seemed to be a life-time (which was in fact only a few short minutes she used to calmly chew up her chow), she looked up (with the chicken leg still in her hand) and replied with a mature calmness: “Well, you know mom? These things are not really very important in life.”

And with that she went back to attacking the poor chicken with the calmness of a saint who returns to his prayers after blessing the followers.

And there sat the counselor, dumb-struck and tongue-tied, at a total loss and drained of anything that could form the next sentence. What does one say to that?

After all, my conversation had in fact actually been a couple of leading questions with expected answers. I had known all the time as to where this conversation would lead and how I would return home with an inspired sweet little girl (OR had I?).

Well, it had not gone quite as expected, but I had treated her to the chicken, so I could still deal a few more cards; at least for my own benefit, if not hers.

Meekly enough I asked: “So what is really important?”

She knew it all along that this was coming. This time the reply was instant: “It is important to do good in life and be happy; for that it is not so important to secure merit and the medals.” She rested her case and I had no more to argue!

What was I missing? Something was just not aligned? I had grown up with the attitude of an achiever and I lived by my crowns. It wasn’t bad after all. In fact it was just great. People also say so. Everyone says the same. What was missing?

The chain of thought continued quite some time along with intermittent reprimands and punishments. I had still not got it and so she had to be wrong (or was she?).

I continued musing and concentrated more on my second-best bet. Now this younger of the siblings has a nice thing for music. Even as a toddler I would catch her humming the jingles she heard from the television. And, by George! Every single time she would get it perfect to the last note.

Naturally the Proud mother in me picked up the hint and planned to create a great singer out of this toddler. Sure enough, no sooner than she turned five, I enrolled her for classical Indian music training. After all, they had to be caught and trained young (I knew it, you know!).

So began the first year of voice training with a well-known teacher. Every day I would be filled with pride hearing her catching on to every note and instruction with ease and perfection. To keep her away from distraction, I would tune in to all the singing contests on television and show her the vision of seeing herself on that stage, being applauded by the nation.

Now, as if my lesson was not learnt well from the elder of the sisters, it came one day from the younger.

Shireen was all of six when I sat her down to prepare her for the music lessons that were to restart soon after a four-week break.

“So baby, your lessons start tomorrow. If you co-operate with me by getting ready without a fuss, we can enjoy this more. Remember mom is doing this for your good.”

An ever contemplative girl that she is, it took her some time to frame what came next. But when it came, it came loud and clear. Her 6-year-old vocabulary was surprisingly apt to deliver the message and with an impact too.

“Mummy, you know why I go for the music lessons with you? It’s only because you keep on saying that ‘if you don’t take these lessons you will not be able to perform in competitions and that other kids will surpass you.’”

This was quite a surprise. I stopped folding the laundry and asked her: “What if I do not say these things to you?”

A calm and very sure reply followed instantly: “I am not interested in going for the music lessons!!!”

Do you see a pattern here? I certainly did start to see something... first Malvika and then Shireen... and then it struck me like lightning... I had always been a personality eager to please others, and thrived on the praise and accolades from all those around me. It had been very important for me to be appreciated by one and all. So much so that I extended myself beyond all limits to be in the good books of all. That included participations, studies, self-discipline, sugar-sweetness... not that I did not like to be that way, but now I knew clearly that my major motivation was to be liked and appreciated. Though I exerted to excel at all that I liked, I also took enough pains for many things just to please others.

It had become my reality and in turn by belief. My belief said this was the only right way to live and if not anyone else, at the least my children have to learn this ‘Truth’... my truth... I wanted to make it their truth... that had seemed to be the only right thing to be a good parent!

And here were my children, so young... telling me in no unclear words – Our truth is different from yours mom!

FOLLOW ON

It took a lot of time for this new truth to sink in. Learning happens in stages. First there is exposure and experience. Then it is followed by logical/intellectual understanding. Till such time, though one feels knowledgeable, the knowledge cannot be put to use in the real sense.

Later, if there are few more exposures and you can really be aware, it is followed by assimilation and this is when the deeper meaning can be understood.

Yet, for any new learning to become a part of you, you have to have 'realisation' and for this stage, a Guru is often needed. I am fortunate to have been found by my Guru and under his guidance and blessing came this life-changing lesson.

LESSON I LEARNT

Your truth may not be my truth, but it is still a truth. Children are not experienced in the ways of this world and they need to be guided, but that does not mean that they do not have a truth. Many a times they have bigger truths, as they are more connected to their source. They may not be always 'right' according to this world, yet it does not mean that they are 'wrong'.

If we can be open to listen to their truth (how much ever it may sound like childish banter to us), and if we can just listen instead of telling them off only because what they have to say is not what we are accustomed to hearing, things can be very different.

They need us to guide them. Their tantrums to let them be their way may at times be harmful to them, and yet if we wish to help them, we need to listen and listen with an intention of respecting their truth. Those bits of truths, their truth, are going to give us valuable insights into the unique personalities of our precious

children. And if we fail to listen, if we insist on our truth being the only truth, we would do what most parents are doing today – make the children what they are not.

When I say we need to listen, I do not mean that we have to let them take their own course every time. What we need to do is to listen to them and respect them for the unique individuals that they are, and then guide them accordingly. This way we would not do much harm to their personalities. Instead, we would nurture their individuality and help them to develop their faith in us as guides and mentors.

Children have to be given an opportunity to explore and live their truth for them to live an authentic life as adults.

Khalil Gibran sums it up:

... You may Give them your love, but not your thoughts

For they have their own thoughts

You may house their bodies but not their souls

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,

Which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams

(The Prophet)

EXPRESSION OF LOVE

Asking for love has been an absolute no-no in my culture, at least for my generation. All intimate needs are very personal. So much so that one cannot really show her need for love and intimacy. If you noticed the ‘her’ need here – it is because it is considered quite uncouth for a female to do so. There exists a real danger of being labeled ‘fast’ and that can trigger all sorts of doubts and questions on your character.

Brought up in such an environment, I was a typical model. Now, belonging to the female of the species, and that too one given to the fantasies of a fairy tale, it

was a particularly difficult one for me. A conservative family regards the display of one's softer emotions and touching anyone else other than your spouse incorrect, and that made it no easier for me.

I do not remember a hug by either of my parents since I could remember anything. Brothers of similar age group were no consideration for this category at all. But I remember craving for hugs all the time. My teenage fantasies would often be lingering around a loving 'bear hug' and some soft words whispered to me. It seemed to me the ultimate in expressing one's love.

But a fantasy it was, and as the story goes, it was to remain a fantasy for long. Marriage into another similarly conservative family did not help either.

Surprisingly, my parents believed in extending equal rights to their daughter as to their sons when it came to exploring the world. I tried my hands at unconventional careers and participating in beauty pageants and all with their full support.

And yet, simple things like talking about one's emotions and expressing feelings with touch always seemed to be the most awkward things to do, rather even to think about.

Soon after marriage, I realised I had chosen another similar family, including my spouse. Intimacy meant only that which existed behind closed doors. The same sense of awkwardness continued in my life and so did my craving.

I did hug my children quite often and their being girls helped. But children grow up, and so I secretly wished that they would remain small enough to be easy with our close intimacy and the warm moments.

My first-born had in some way picked up on the family tradition and as a child was not very comfortable with very intimate moments. A very active and restless

child, she always seemed to be wriggling out of any hugs. I remember her as a very sweet child who brought out a surge of love in everyone. Wanting to hold her seemed to be the most natural thing. And yet, she would make it very clear that it was not most welcomed.

Shireen on the contrary came up as a contrast by every standard. Oh! She was like me! All the time happy to be close to someone, and her best smiles vibrated when she was hugged and kissed and tickled.

Now, in some way, the same awkwardness that had inhibited me all these years seem to be working against her too. Especially as she started growing out of her crawls, all the antennas against intimacies seemed to be coming up. To make things worse, the period of my depression and family turbulence hit at the same time as she was growing up.

Other family members had almost outgrown the child in her and had their traditional reservations up, and I was so neck deep into my depression that all I wanted most at any time was to left alone. Funny though... it was love and intimacy that I had been craving for all my life and here I was hiding away from the one little person who could understand and share nothing but love. Such are the tragedies of being human. Loss of awareness often keeps us away from our most cherished desires.

However, Shireen would manage to steal a hug or two and a few kisses from me even as I tried to shrink during the day.

Then, with the family harmony in mess, I decided to send both the girls to a boarding school in a desperate attempt to bring some routine and peace to their daily life. Thankfully it was not a very painful transition for me as the kids accepted my reasoning and gracefully took their steps towards the halls of the girls' dormitory.

Though I had thought through a lot of different aspects of hostel life away from home for the kids, Shireen's need to be hugged and to hug in return had cruelly skipped my mind. Though now I think, given my own unsatisfied need for warmth all my life, I should have been more sensitive to hers.

Then one day Malvika complained that her little sister was being an embarrassment to her in the presence of her dorm mates. The reason? Well, Shireen would come to her for her dose of hug every day!

Now I didn't know how to respond to that. When you have more than one of them, balancing is always the challenge. It was Shireen's need and Malvika's embarrassment. How does one handle that? Well sometimes one needs to refrain from doing anything about certain situations. Limited calling time rule in the hostel came to my rescue and I could get away without having to actually 'solve' the situation!

But it did get me thinking about my decision to send the little one to the boarding. Frequent complaints from both the sisters on this issue became a regular topic of conversation during the weekly phone calls. Malvika's issue was temporary, during those few moments her sister approached for the hug, but I could see that for Shireen this was a trying situation. She was struggling to get something that was her right. Wasn't it the same for me? A hug to make me feel that I was loved and needed was all that I longed for. And yet I could see no way out for myself or for her.

FOLLOW ON

About two months from Malvika's first complaint, a jubilant Shireen commented: "Ma, finally Malvika has improved." Then, among chuckles, she

informed me that now her sister does not resist to her hugs, and that she was very happy about it.

As a smile of contentment came to me, it also struck me that love had won over everything else. But I also could not stop wondering about the tenacity of this little one. All through this period, though Malvika would be seething with anger and struggling with her embarrassment, Shireen had always been cheerful and took her rejections in her stride till she was able to break through the pseudo veneer of embarrassment of her sister! Bravo!

LESSON I LEARNT

The one who is in love continues to be in love even in the midst of hostility and rejection. If the heart intends only love, it is difficult for others not to feel it.

I learnt from Malvika that she was courageous enough to overcome her barrier and open herself up to the need of her little sister. I'm sure it must not have been easier for her, but open she did!

The nature of the soul is love, but it needs strong people to express as well as accept love! Children have no social inhibitions that as adults we acquire over the years. We need to learn from children to express love more openly and even to ask for it.

Often it is seen that people suffer silently in the absence of love. Not being aware of the real nature of their ailment, they resort to blame games and finger-pointing in a desperate attempt to find some reason for their sufferings. A tender touch, a bear hug, some genuine words of concern often do the trick that healers and consultants fail to deliver. And yet, 'love' still being a taboo word in many societies, this simple yet effective magic remedy remains out of the reach of most.

To ask for love and to give love abundantly requires a lot of self-assurance and courage. It is much easier to reject and reprimand than to accept and love. Our children have both. We need to learn it from them.

Also I believe we have a bigger responsibility to protect the children from the awkward social systems that curiously takes pride in expressing hostility and shame in expressing love.

TO BECOME OR TO BE

The education and training that we impart to our children for becoming financially successful, unfortunately, is based on the law of commons. It does not take into consideration the individuality of a child. Giving in to this law, most parents too fail to respect the individuality of a soul we have been honoured to bring into this world. We force the harshness of our education system on every child. We frequently execute the very soul of the child by evaluating him on a common and very much outdated scale. On that scale only children who have the ability to learn their lessons and reproduce them in a particular manner are declared to be 'intelligent' and 'capable', while all the rest are left to find themselves in this lost world.

Initially, under the pressure of parents and eventually knowing this to be the only approach to life, young individuals join the rat race – many of the times against their callings. Why? Because we tell them to take the safe, secured, tried and tested path. Because we believe that that is the only path to happiness. They may become financially successful, but remember, it is the RAT RACE. The trouble with a Rat Race is that even if you win, you are still a miserable little rat. Teach them to discover the lion within them and run with other lions at their own pace; no matter even if they lose, they would still be lions.

In my decade-long practice as a career counselor, I often spent time with parents of the students who come for counseling. To my surprise, at least 60 per cent of the so-called successful parents would lament after witnessing the process of counseling: “If I had someone to guide and counsel me years ago, I would surely have taken up some other career.”

Right from the day a child is born, parents start planning for what she should ‘become’. So much is the aspiration of the parents that they plan out for the kids to ‘become’ all that they could not. Right after the child learns to walk, they arrange – dance, sports, music and other skills training for them. Of course by this time the ‘education’ has started in full swing too. Pre-schools take up kids at 1½ years and by the time they are 2½, they have to start preparing for ‘entrance examinations’ to secure admission in a ‘reputed’ school. The child has to ‘become’ every minute. In order to ‘become’ some sports star or scientist in the future, today he has to ‘become’ a time-bound, obedient robot of his parents.

The tragedy of all this becoming is that the little chap has no time to ‘BE’, or to discover his soul’s calling. What it does is walk and run blindly on a path that we have chalked out for her with our input from society at large. It is essentially all about us. We take pride when she becomes a ‘top ranker’, we celebrate when she becomes a ‘state player’, we show off when she becomes the ‘best student’. You might argue that the child is also enjoying their times when her ‘becoming’ is celebrated. But the truth is that in most cases we are teaching her that these are the only reasons and times to celebrate and be happy.

The message is clear: ‘You have a right to be happy only when you ‘become’ something. Something that is approved by the society at large. Something that we believe has ‘prestige’ in it. Anything. But it seems the essential is to ‘become’.’

Sometimes this ‘becoming’ matches with the calling of the soul, and the results are confident, happy, progressive individuals.

But in many cases, the two do not match. And what we see as a result of this mismatch is financially successful, but brooding, complaining, sick, frustrated people who seem to have no clue of what went wrong and where to start again.

At my counseling centre, I met Meera, a second-year Engineering student. The parents had brought her to me as she was not performing in college and seemed to be depressed and rebellious. While talking to her, Meera seemed to be a quiet girl and nothing close to a rebel. Albeit, she did seem to be disturbed. Slowly, as the complete story unfolded, it was a frightening one for the poor soul. Meera was an above-average student in school and her parents had high expectations from her. As she failed to score enough to get through the Engineering entrance, they insisted on her joining a private institute. Meera was not interested or inclined towards technical subjects; she wanted to study Fine Arts. But the parents forced her to take up Engineering. To secure admission to the private institute, both the parents, clerks by profession, coughed up their entire savings, plus borrowed from future saving funds. Thus started the long tragic journey of Meera. Not having the aptitude for a technical course, she was not able to perform and failed repeatedly. This enraged her parents who constantly blamed her for all the money they had invested in her, driving the poor soul to contemplate suicide in order to put an end to all the problems of her parents and herself.

During the process of counseling, Meera came up with some of her artwork and I was amazed to see the raw talent in her. It was certainly an exhibit fit for an art gallery, and more important was the delight and pure bliss that exuded from Meera as she talked about it.

Every heart has a calling. It's just that it has to be given time and nourishment. But as parents we do not have patience. We are possessed by the drive to 'make' something out of our child, contrary to what Tattvamasi Swetketu says: "You are already that, there is no need to become."

Can we accept that which our child is? The challenge is for us. We have the social pressure to fight off. Even if our child is not properly dressed for the occasion, we take it as personal shame. For us, somehow it seems essential that our children excel and that too at the earliest and according to the defined parameters of society.

Osho quotes the Bhagwad Gita: "It is better to live your own destiny imperfectly than to live an imitation of somebody else's life with perfection."

It is obvious, when you follow your heart, there is a satisfaction and pride even in failure and falls. As Tao Tzu says: "Let everything be allowed to do what it naturally does, so that its nature will be satisfied."

We don't force a car to fly or a cat to bark because that would take care of two needs in one. Neither do we push fit a belt size 44 in 32... We do not expect a rose shrub to bear a sunflower, we do not force a fish to fly, and we do not torture a microwave oven into roasting then why do we not consider that our children are born with a particular nature? Why do we torture the ones we claim to love most into 'becoming' something that they are not? Why, we even refuse to take into consideration that they might be having a different calling, a different purpose as a soul? Why can't we nurture and love what they are and can be?

Nothing can emphasize this more than these beautiful words by Parker J. Parmer in the soulful work, *The Hidden Wholeness*: "Like every good gardener, good potter, good teacher and parent, understand that the 'other' with which we work is never more raw material to be formed into any shape we chose. Every 'other' we

work with has its own nature, its own limits and potentials with which we must learn to co-create if we hope to get good results.’

Every person who is born is a soul born with a purpose. No soul is ever born without a purpose. And eventually it will discover its calling. We as privileged parents of these souls need to nurture and gently guide them towards their calling. As parents, our responsibility is to provide safety, nurturing and love to this precious soul. At early life we need to ensure its safety and gently introduce it to the world. Later we have to show it the essence of a disciplined life by living one. Then keep the communication channels open to help it explore its options and hear its calling clearly.

Love them for what they are. Help them to ‘BE’ and they will be at their best.

FOLLOW ON

Unfortunately, in spite of the counseling, the parents pressed on Meera to continue her education for Engineering. Their plea was: “My child is intelligent, she is not putting in enough efforts and she needs to stop such useless distractions like her art.”

I never heard from Meera or her parents again, but I often wondered how entrapped her soul must be feeling, desperate to break free towards the calling of its heart.

LESSON I LEARNT

Meera knew it all the way. And so do most children. They are more tuned in to their calling.

A profession is the expression of one's purpose of life. An interest is the calling of our subconscious that would ultimately lead us to our purpose. Since a career is the biggest occupation of one's life, it is the vehicle to take us through to our purpose. Instead of looking at it only as a means of earning and success, we need to keep in focus the intention of helping the child towards its purpose.

They may not be knowing how to turn their calling into a profession. They certainly need to be guided for that. But as parents we need to increase our awareness that every interest when honed professionally can give a decent career. Instead of forcing our children to something that the world says is 'THE' only profession, we need to spend some time in understanding our child and researching the options that are best suited for them.

Be it known that every person with the proper sanity of mind manages to earn for itself and its family, but when life is spent doing something that is not in line with our purpose, in spite of all the wealth and fame, the heart suffers in misery all through.

Every parent vehemently asserts that all they want for their children is happiness. And yet they try to push the child towards money and status. Instead of helping the child to make money out of what really makes them happy, they create a pseudo belief that only money would bring them happiness. As grown-ups, we all know that this is not true... but we fall prey to the social pressure that endorses a certain way of living and condemns the rest.

Because of the abundance and prosperity with which we are bringing up our children, the coming generation would be disillusioned with materialism much sooner. And when that happens, if they do not have any contact with their real self, they would end up frustrated and lost. We need to learn to listen to them and help.

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