

LESSONS BEYOND CLASSES

ZAFIN PAREKH



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Shikshan Pranali

*Tijarat Bani hai aaj Shikshan pranali,
Hote hai yahan ab to sirf jeb khali,
Nikalte they kabhi yahan se Gandhi aur Pandit,
Isi dwar se nikalte hai aaj Gunde Mawali.
Hukm diya kabhi ustadon ne,
To sar ankhon pe wo baat rahi.
Aaj chuwa kisi guru ne to samjho,
Kal college me stike rahi.
Itihas gawah hai, misalein hai zinda,
Kat te they ustadon ke liye shagird apna angutha,
Dohrana chahe wahi itihas koi shikshak,
To samjho kat gaya unhi ka angutha.*

- Zafin Parekh

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Ethics and Morals

Teaching and medicine are noble professions that shape individuals and society. Teachers nurture minds, fostering knowledge and values, while doctors heal bodies, ensuring physical well-being. According to Dr APJ Abdul Kalam's vision, teachers, mothers, and fathers play pivotal roles in transforming society. A teacher imparts education, a mother instils love and ethics, and a father provides guidance and strength, together building a progressive community.

A good teacher doesn't teach from books but from the heart. And one should teach from the heart. Teachers who teach with heart earn a place in their students' hearts and are remembered fondly.

A good teacher isn't just focused on completing the syllabus; they also work to eliminate a child's flaws, shaping them into a better human being and contributing to society. This is a teacher's duty for a better society.

A teacher is like a candle that burns itself to illuminate students' lives. By sacrificing today, a teacher lights up children's futures.

I recall that when I was in Class 10, our school offered a weekly ethics and morals class. However, since I began teaching, I haven't seen such courses in any school, either for students or in teacher training. Perhaps this is why today,

neither students nor teachers seem to exhibit ethics and morals. Of course, there are always exceptions.

Nowadays, children don't even know the meaning of "moral." I recall teaching a political science chapter in a school, where a sentence stated that one of the drawbacks of democracy is that politicians become so focused on gaining power that there is little scope for morality. A student asked, "Sir, what do you mean by moral?" I left politics aside and started explaining what a moral is, and soon the political science class turned into a philosophy class. I began explaining morals and ethics to my students using examples of prominent personalities, such as Sir M. Visvesvaraya.

Sir Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya (September 15, 1861 – April 12, 1962), popularly known as Sir M.V., was an eminent Indian civil engineer, statesman, scholar, and visionary. He is widely regarded as one of India's most outstanding engineers and a pioneer in civil engineering and infrastructure development. His contributions to engineering, irrigation, and nation-building earned him the title of the "Father of Modern Mysore" and a lasting legacy in India's technological and industrial advancement. In recognition of his exceptional work, he was knighted by the British Empire in 1915 and awarded India's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, in 1955. His birthday, September 15, is celebrated as Engineers' Day in India, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania, in honour of his contributions to engineering.

In a moral class, we came to know that, one night, Sir M. Visvesvaraya, the then Diwan of Mysore and an engineer, was working on government accounts by the light of a candle. As soon as he finished his work, he extinguished the candle, took

another one from the cupboard, lit it, and wrote a personal letter to his family under its light. After finishing, he told his assistant to post the letter the next day. The assistant politely asked, “Sir, I noticed you lit one candle and then extinguished it to light another. Why didn’t you write the letter under the first candle’s light? Both candles are half-burned now—what’s the point of burning two?” Visvesvaraya replied, “You’ve observed well. This government house provided the first candle; both the house and the candle belong to the government. I was using its light for government work. Once that was done, I put out the government’s candle. For my work, I lit a candle that I had bought with my own money. I use my candle for my work, and the government uses candles for government work. I cannot justify using a government candle, bought with taxpayers’ money, for my personal use.”

This was one of the finest examples of morals and ethics that I shared with my students.

One day, while Sir M. Visvesvaraya was cutting an apple, he accidentally cut his hand with the knife. Blood began to flow, and his assistant immediately called for a doctor. A government doctor arrived at 9 PM. Visvesvaraya was feeling a bit faint. The doctor bandaged his hand and left. When Visvesvaraya regained his senses, he asked his assistant if he had paid the doctor’s fee. The assistant shook his head, indicating no. Visvesvaraya handed the assistant the doctor’s fee and instructed him to go immediately and pay the doctor. When the assistant went to the doctor, the doctor refused to accept the fee and returned with the assistant to Visvesvaraya’s house. Visvesvaraya insisted that the doctor take the fee, but the doctor said, “Sir, I am a government doctor; how can I

accept a fee? I receive a salary from the government, not from patients.” Visvesvaraya responded, “Absolutely, you are a government doctor, and you shouldn’t take fees from patients. However, your duty hours are from 9 AM to 6 PM. After 6 PM, you dedicate your time to your family. I called you during your personal time, so this fee is justified.”

Without ethics and morals, no profession can exist, whether it’s a doctor or a teacher. For example, a doctor’s ethics dictate that they deal with the patient’s body. A doctor doesn’t consider the patient’s religion, caste, economic status, or level of education. A doctor doesn’t judge the patient’s character, whether they are good or a criminal. A doctor only focuses on the body.

In 2016, a major kidney transplant racket (illegal organ trade/sale) was busted in a hospital in Mumbai.

- Mumbai Police arrested 5 senior staff members/doctors, including the CEO and others.
- The hospital's organ transplant licence was immediately suspended/cancelled by the authorities (Directorate of Health Services and others).
- Individual medical licences/practising rights of the arrested doctors were also suspended/revoked.
- It involved illegal kidney transplants for money, with brokers and donors involved.

Look at this case closely. These doctors spent 30 years of their lives—countless nights of study, endless sacrifices, and tireless effort—becoming qualified professionals. They became doctors, yes... but what good is all that education if it leads

you straight to jail? Knowledge without a strong moral compass is empty; it can destroy lives, including your own.

True success isn't just about degrees, skills, or status—it's about becoming a moral and ethical professional. A doctor without ethics is no doctor at all; any professional who lacks integrity is simply not a professional. When you choose to cheat the system, bend the rules, or compromise your values for quick gains, you set a dangerous example. How, then, can you expect your own children not to follow the same path? How will you look them in the eye? How will you face your family with your head held high? How will you walk into society without shame weighing you down?

The real failure here isn't just in the crime—it's in the education system that focuses only on filling minds with facts and techniques, while leaving the conscience hollow and unchecked. We train brilliant minds, but we forget to nurture strong hearts and unshakable principles.

This is a wake-up call for all of us. Every school, every college, every professional course must have dedicated classes on ethics, integrity, and moral responsibility. We cannot keep producing hollow professionals who look successful on the outside but are broken within. Let's build not just experts, but good human beings—people who heal, uplift, and inspire, rather than exploit and betray.

Choose the harder path: the one of honesty, courage, and character. Because in the end, your legacy isn't measured by how much you earned or how famous you became—it's measured by how you lived, how you treated others, and whether you left the world better than you found it.

Rise above shortcuts. Build a life—and a society—worth being proud of. The future depends on professionals like you... But only if your ethics match your expertise. Let's make that happen, starting today.

Similarly, a teacher's morals and ethics require that, if paid to teach for 40 minutes, they teach wholeheartedly for the full 40 minutes. If a teacher arrives 10 minutes late to class, spends 10 minutes on irrelevant talk, and only teaches for 20 minutes but takes the full 40 minutes' pay, that is against morals. A teacher's salary is derived from fees paid by all students in the class, so it is their duty to ensure that what they teach is understood by all. If only 4 out of 40 students know what you teach, yet you charge fees to all 40, that is immoral. In short, it means your morals are corrupt.

My 5-year-old son and I go to the same school every day. I teach here, so naturally he studies here. His school timings are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., while mine run from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. After his classes finish at 2, he stays back under the gentle guidance of one of the teachers, quietly completing his homework. By the time my day ends at 3, I pick him up, and we walk home together—hand in hand, father and son. This has been our beautiful, unchanging routine for a long time.

At home, I never make him do homework again because he's already done it at school. One afternoon, though, the teacher who usually helped him was on leave, so no one supervised his work. We both came home without a second thought. I didn't even ask about his homework—I simply assumed it was done as always.

The next morning, after we had bathed, dressed, and were ready for school, my eyes fell on his homework book still lying untouched. I asked gently, “Beta, did you do your homework?” He looked up with those innocent eyes and said, “No, Daddy.” I asked, “Then why didn’t you tell me? We could have finished it together last night before bedtime.” He had simply forgotten, just like small children do.

I paused for a moment, then asked, “So what will we do now?” In his sweet, childish way, he came up with an idea: “Daddy, let’s leave the homework book at home. We’ll tell Madam that we forgot it at home.” For a fleeting second, it sounded like an easy way out. But then something deeper stirred inside me.

If I agreed—if I let him take the shortcut of a small lie today—wouldn’t I be planting the very first seed of dishonesty in his heart? How could I, a teacher who stands in front of a classroom every day asking students to be truthful, ever expect them to value honesty if I allowed my own child to learn the opposite at home?

So, I knelt down to his level, looked into his eyes, and said with calm firmness and love:

“No, beta. We don’t hide the truth, even when it feels uncomfortable. You take the book to school. You go to Madam and say honestly, ‘Ma’am, I forgot to do my homework. I’m sorry.’ Then bring the book back home. In the evening, you and I will sit together and finish it—no rush, no scolding, just you and me learning side by side.”

He nodded quietly, picked up the book, and went to school.

That day turned out to be unexpectedly kind. The teacher who usually helps him had returned from leave. When she

heard what happened, she sat with him patiently and helped him complete not just that day's work, but the previous day's as well.

But more than the homework getting done, what mattered most was the lesson that stayed with him—and with me.

As a father and as a teacher, I reminded myself: Charity begins at home. Integrity begins at home. If I want my students to grow into honest, responsible human beings, the first place that honesty must live is in the way I raise my own son. I cannot preach truth in the classroom while allowing even the smallest lie under my own roof.

That morning, I didn't just teach my child how to own a mistake. I reaffirmed for myself the kind of man—and the kind of father—I want to be.

Because the greatest lessons we ever give our children are not the ones we speak... they are the ones we live. And when we choose courage over convenience, truth over convenience, love over shortcuts—we don't just raise good students. We raise good human beings.

And that, truly, is the legacy worth building—one honest moment at a time.

One day, a team from Bangalore visited our school. They specialised in conducting classes to improve students' handwriting. As the class teacher, I was instructed to collect ₹150 from each student as the fee for these handwriting improvement classes.

I collected the money from all the students, prepared a list, and handed over the entire amount to the principal.

After that, both the students and I began waiting for our turn. The children were especially excited and kept asking when the handwriting team would return and when their classes would begin.

A week passed, but no classes were held. Parents started calling me with inquiries. I somehow managed to pacify them by saying that the classes would probably start on Monday.

When Monday arrived, I went to the principal's cabin and explained the situation:

"Ma'am, the parents' calls are continuing. They are repeatedly asking about the handwriting classes for which they have already paid."

The principal replied casually,

"The team that came from Bangalore has already left."

I was shocked and asked,

"Ma'am, how can they just leave like that? The children have paid the fees, everyone is waiting, and even the parents are anxious."

She simply said, "Just tell the parents that the team has left."

I tried to reason with her:

"Ma'am, if I say that, the parents will naturally have many questions. They will ask – if the team has left, when will they come back? If they are really coming again, please issue a circular with a specific date so we can give the parents some

assurance. And if the team is not returning at all, then the fees should be refunded."

Her response was firm: "The money will not be refunded. Whenever the team comes back, we will conduct the classes. You just find some way to convince the parents."

I was deeply disturbed by the management's attitude and complete lack of accountability.

Left with no choice, I called the parents again. As expected, they asked the very same questions I had anticipated. Many of them said, "Sir, you are the class teacher. We gave the money to you, so we will ask you only."

I tried to explain: "I did not collect this money for myself. The school instructed me to collect it, and I immediately handed over every rupee — along with the list — to the school. I don't have a single paisa with me."

But the parents were in no mood to accept this explanation.

I went back to the principal once more and narrated the entire conversation with the parents. I pleaded:

"Ma'am, please refund the money now. If the team ever returns in the future, we can collect the fees again."

By this time, the pressure from my parents had become intense, and I was constantly conveying it to the principal, who was also the school's owner.

Seeing the mounting pressure and perhaps my growing discomfort, she directly told me to resign. Without taking even a moment to think, I submitted my resignation.

I often wonder how the very same people who lack basic moral integrity can run schools. Their only concern seems to be making money.

The education system has become entirely commercialised. My religion has taught me that taking money from others without genuine effort or justification is haram (forbidden), and anything purchased or acquired with such unjust earnings is also haram.

When school authorities lack true faith, what kind of education are they truly providing? If you yourself are immoral, what morals can you possibly teach the children?

What these authorities truly want are not teachers who impart moral values, but rather those who unquestioningly collect money on their behalf—under any pretext: sometimes fines, sometimes handwriting classes, sometimes shoes, sometimes uniforms—and hand it over without raising a single question.

This approach betrays the very purpose of education and erodes trust at its core.

Similarly, a doctor cannot treat every patient in the same way. Every patient's illness is different. Even if it's a fever, not all fevers are the same; there are varieties of fevers. It's essential to determine what type of fever a patient has and its cause. A doctor cannot provide the same treatment to all patients. Some need tablets, some require IV fluids, some need injections, and others may need surgery. Some patients can even recover with just counselling. Just as a doctor cannot treat all patients the same way, a teacher cannot treat all students the same way. Some students improve with just a few kind words, while others need scolding; some require a

complaint; and sometimes a teacher might even need to raise their hand as a parent. A Sufi saint once said that the discipline from a father or teacher is like water for a field. However, nowadays, physical punishment is banned and considered a crime, and students are taking full advantage of this.

Just as a doctor asks a patient many questions before reaching a conclusion—such as how long the fever has been, what was eaten yesterday, whether there’s a headache along with the fever, or if the patient feels dizzy, etc.—and only after listening to all the answers does the doctor arrive at a conclusion about the patient’s problem, similarly, a teacher cannot understand or solve a student’s issue until they gather detailed information, listen to the student, or learn about their background. Only then can the teacher identify and address the student’s problem effectively.

I remember that during my teaching career, there was a school where I was appointed discipline head. My job was to ensure that the students wore their uniforms, shoes, ID cards, and badges properly daily. If they didn’t, I had to penalise them. Many students quickly fell in line with proper discipline after my instructions. However, there was one boy who, despite repeated warnings, wouldn’t wear shoes and came to school in slippers. One day, I twisted his ear and asked, “Don’t you understand that you need to wear shoes to school? You’re not supposed to enter without shoes. I’ve been telling you for a week to buy new shoes, but you’re still so stubborn.” I asked, “What does your father do?” The boy’s eyes filled with tears, and looking at me, he said, “I don’t have a dad. He passed away two years ago.” Hearing this, I was stunned. I then asked,

“Who pays your school fees?” He replied, “My uncle.” When I asked about his mother, he said, “My mom works as a maid in other people’s houses.” Hearing this, my heart sank. I felt terrible for scolding him without knowing his background.

Then, I went to his class and told the boy to fill my water bottle. As he stepped out, I addressed his classmates, saying, “See, this boy in your class has no father, and his mother is poor. He doesn’t have shoes. I could buy him shoes with my own money, but I want all of you to be part of this good deed. Contribute whatever you can.” The classmates started contributing—some gave one rupee, some fifty, some ten. In this way, the class collected 601 rupees. I added 100 rupees, and during the lunch break, I took the class monitor and the boy to a shoe shop. With 701 rupees, we bought a pair of black shoes and two pairs of white socks. When we returned to class, the boy said, “Sir, I want to say something to my friends.” I said, “Go ahead.” He stood in front of the class, but as he began to speak, tears streamed down his face. He wanted to say so much but couldn’t. With great difficulty, he composed himself and simply said, “Thank you very much.”

Role of a Mother In Character Building

I

ABDUL QADIR JILANI (RH)

When Abdul Qadir was a young man, around 18 years old, he sought his mother's permission to travel from his hometown of Jilan (in present-day Iraq) to Baghdad to pursue knowledge. His mother, a devout and wise woman, agreed but gave him strict instructions to uphold the truth at all costs.

She prepared him for the journey and sewed 40 gold coins into the lining of his garment for his expenses, advising him to keep them safe. Abdul Qadir joined a caravan heading to Baghdad. During the journey, the caravan was ambushed by a group of bandits. The robbers looted the travellers, taking their valuables. When they approached Abdul Qadir, they asked him if he had anything of value. Following his mother's instruction to always speak the truth, he replied honestly, "Yes, I have 40 gold coins sewn into my garment."

The bandits, thinking he was joking or naive, laughed and dismissed his statement. They took him to their leader, who asked the same question. Again, Abdul Qadir truthfully repeated that he had 40 gold coins hidden in his garment. Intrigued by his honesty, the bandit leader ordered his men to check, and they found the coins exactly where Abdul Qadir said they were.

The leader was astonished and asked why he had revealed the truth, knowing it could cost him his wealth. Abdul Qadir replied, “My mother made me promise always to tell the truth, and I could not break that promise, even if it meant losing everything.”

Moved by his integrity and devotion to his mother’s teachings, the bandit leader was overcome with remorse. He and his gang were so inspired by Abdul Qadir’s truthfulness that they repented for their actions, returned the stolen goods to the caravan, and vowed to abandon their life of crime. This encounter not only spared Abdul Qadir but also transformed the bandits’ hearts, who saw his honesty as a reflection of divine virtue.

This story is often cited in Islamic tradition to illustrate the power of truthfulness and the influence of righteous upbringing. Abdul Qadir’s unwavering commitment to his mother’s advice demonstrated his piety and set an example for others. It also underscores the Sufi principle that adherence to truth and moral conduct can inspire change in others, even in the most unlikely circumstances.

The story is widely recounted in biographies of Abdul Qadir Jilani, such as *Qalaid al-Jawahir* and other hagiographical works. It remains a cherished anecdote among his followers and admirers of his legacy as a spiritual leader and founder of the Qadiriyya Sufi order.

II

ALLAMA MUHAMMAD IQBAL

Allama Muhammad Iqbal was born in 1877 in Sialkot, Punjab, into a modest Kashmiri Muslim family. His father, Sheikh Noor Muhammad, was a tailor and embroiderer who later ventured into small-scale business activities. Some accounts suggest he may have been involved in money-lending, a common practice in the region at the time, though there's no definitive evidence that his business was primarily focused on interest-bearing loans (usury, or *riba*), which is generally frowned upon in Islamic teachings. Imam Bibi, Iqbal's mother, was a pious woman known for her devotion to Islam, her charity, and her teaching of the Quran to local girls. She played a significant role in shaping Iqbal's moral and spiritual outlook.

The specific story about Imam Bibi purchasing a goat to feed Iqbal with its milk, possibly to avoid the taint of income from interest, does not appear in well-known biographies or reliable sources about Iqbal's life, such as *Iqbal: His Life and Times* by Khurram Ali Shafique or other scholarly works. This may be a local or anecdotal story not widely recorded or verified. In the cultural context of 19th-century Punjab, families sometimes kept goats for fresh milk, especially for children, as a common practice for health and nutrition. If such an incident occurred, it could reflect Imam Bibi's care for her son's well-being, possibly influenced by her piety and by her desire to ensure his sustenance came from pure (halal) sources, especially if she had concerns about the family's income sources.

If this story stems from oral tradition or a specific source you've encountered, it might reflect the broader theme of Imam Bibi's emphasis on ethical living, which aligns with her influence on Iqbal's values of integrity and faith, as seen in his poetry and philosophy. For instance, Iqbal's elegy for his mother after her death in 1914 highlights her devotion and moral guidance:

- Who would wait for me anxiously in my native place?
- Who will now think of me in midnight prayers?

Without primary evidence of the goat story, I can suggest that it may symbolise Imam Bibi's protective and principled nature. If you have more details about the source of this story (e.g., a book, oral tradition, or specific incident), I can help explore it further or cross-reference it with available materials. Alternatively, I can search for related anecdotes or provide more details about Iqbal's early life and his mother's influence. Would you like me to do so?

Teacher - Second Parent

I

Just as a farmer feels joy watching his flourishing fields, a teacher should feel the same joy when they see their students. A farmer does not discriminate among his crops, nurturing them all equally, and similarly, a teacher should view all students with the same regard. My father had put me in a hostel right from kindergarten, and being a mamma's boy, I always yearned to stay with my mother. During holidays, I eagerly awaited my father's arrival to take us home. The moment he came, I would jump with joy. At home, I would cling to my mother, overjoyed. Every day in my prayers, I ask that the holidays never end, that I stay at home with my mother forever, and that I ride behind my father on his scooter and see the fields. As time passed, a fear began to grip me, and the thought of school filled me with dread. When my father said the holidays were ending and we had to return to school the day after tomorrow, it felt like a heart attack. At night, I would cling to my mother, pleading with her to ask my father to let me stay a few more days. When she did, he would extend the holidays by a day or two. But eventually, the holidays would end, and I had to go.

I remember during third-grade summer vacation, with just one day left before the hostel reopened and the holidays ended. That morning, when my mother went to our farmhouse across from the house to milk the cow, I followed

her. She started milking the cow, and I, holding a sickle, began digging or playing in the garden. A worker from our fields came and asked for the sickle. I refused to give it to him. He tried to take it by force, and I, stubbornly, started crying. The worker complained to my mother that I wasn't giving him the sickle. By then, she had finished milking and, in anger, shouted at me to hand it over. But I, being stubborn, refused. She got furious, picked up a stick, and started beating me. I cried. She snatched the sickle from my hand and gave it to the worker. Sobbing, I returned home. My mother followed with the milk container. At home, my heart said, "Today is the last day of my holidays, and my mother beat me so much. Maybe she doesn't love me." I decided not to talk to her until I left for school. Her anger had subsided by then, and she realised it was the last day of my holidays and that she had beaten me. She felt regret and tried to get close to me, talk to me, and console me, but she failed. That night, I, who never slept far from my mother, slept apart from her.

The next day, when it was time to leave for the hostel, I bathed, put on my uniform, and got ready. My mother, knowing I wouldn't be back for four or five months, made my favourite breakfast. Still, I didn't talk to her. She tried to engage me, but I didn't respond. My heart was heavy. After breakfast, when my father and I got up to leave, she took out some loose change to give me. I didn't take it. My father went outside to start his scooter, and I began putting on my shoes. I said goodbye to everyone but stayed upset with my mother. With a heavy heart, she said, "Son, won't you talk to me?" Tears welled up in my eyes, but I didn't reply. Then she said, "Son, at least look at me once." My heart desperately wanted to look at her, to see her fully, but my stubbornness held me back. With teary eyes, I sat behind my father on his scooter.

As the scooter started moving, I couldn't hold back and looked at her. Tears streamed down both our faces. Crying, we reached the hostel. My father dropped me off and left. And I was back in that terrifying environment.

As days went by, I missed my mother terribly. My heart longed to see her, to hug her, to sleep curled up beside her. Every night, in the loneliness, I woke up crying. When the pain became unbearable, I decided to run away from the hostel. There was a door in the hostel's washroom that opened toward the jungle. I thought I'd escape from there. One day, under the pretext of going to the toilet, I ran. But I hadn't gone far when a stationary keeper spotted and recognised me from a distance. He informed the watchman, who told my house master—the drawing teacher—and the principal. The principal scolded the housemaster, telling him to keep a closer eye on the students. Furious from the principal's reprimand, the drawing teacher beat me brutally. My heart ached with the pain of missing my mother, and now my body bore the physical pain of the teacher's beatings. I cried myself to sleep that night.

The next day, the principal called me to his cabin and asked why I ran away. Trembling, with my mother's memories in my heart and tears in my eyes, I said, "I missed my mother." Hearing this, the principal slapped me so hard that I fell. At that moment, I missed my mother intensely. At home, whenever my father hit me, she would rush to protect me. Here, that scene played in my mind—no one came to save me. I was an eight-year-old boy, ostracised by everyone, whose only crime was missing his mother.

We often hear that teachers are second parents. We left our homes to be with these second parents. But these second

parents exist only in name. Parents, too, send their children to schools or hostels, reassured that they are in the hands of second parents and are safe. But no one knows the trauma children endure in schools and hostels.

There have been several tragic incidents in India where students have died due to alleged beatings by teachers, with caste-based discrimination cited as a factor. A nine-year-old Dalit boy died after being beaten by his teacher on July 20, 2022, at a private school in a district of Rajasthan. The boy allegedly drank water from an earthen pot reserved for teachers from higher castes, which infuriated the teacher. According to the boy's father, the teacher used casteist slurs and severely beat Indra, causing internal injuries, including damage to his ear nerves. Indra was taken to hospitals in Jalore, Udaipur, and finally Ahmedabad, where he succumbed to his injuries 24 days later. The teacher was arrested and charged under Section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code and the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. The incident sparked protests, and internet services were suspended in the area to prevent escalation

GREAT LESSONS FROM GREAT TEACHERS

I

After many years, a student fondly remembered his childhood school. He decided to visit the school and meet his old teachers. Upon arriving, he explored every corner of the school, revisiting places tied to his memories. After refreshing those memories, he set out to meet his teachers. There was

one teacher who had changed his life, someone he had always longed to meet again. After much searching, he found that teacher in the school library, engrossed in conversation with some books. From a distance, the student noticed the teacher's face, now lined with wrinkles, showing the weight of age. The teacher's trembling hands struggled to hold a book, and his eyes, peering through glasses, tried to read the words. Seeing his teacher stirred a sense of reverence in the student's heart. He approached and touched the teacher's feet in respect. A conversation began.

The teacher asked, "Who are you?" The student replied, "Sir, I'm your old student. You taught me social studies in classes 8, 9, and 10." The teacher asked for his name. The student shared it, but age had clouded the teacher's memory, and he couldn't recall. To jog his memory, the student recounted an incident: "Sir, perhaps you remember, one day in our class, a girl's golden chain was stolen. During the lunch break, she complained to you, and you didn't let anyone leave the classroom. You closed the door, asked all the students to close their eyes, and started checking everyone's pockets. The PT teacher was checking the bags, while you checked our pockets. When you began searching, I was terrified because I was the one who stole the chain, and it was in my pocket. As you approached me, I thought it was the end of my school life. When you reached into my pocket, my heart sank. I was sure you'd pull out the chain and declare me a thief in front of everyone. But you never revealed my name. After checking all the pockets, you announced that the chain had been found, but never said who had it. Why did you do that, sir?"

As the student recounted the incident, the teacher's memory returned. He said, "Yes, now I remember." He continued, "A teacher isn't just there to teach; they're also called second parents. And no parent would ever humiliate their child or let them be humiliated. Let me tell you something else... when I asked everyone to close their eyes while checking their pockets, I closed mine too. That way, I wouldn't know whose pocket the chain came from or who the thief was. I did this so that the student's image wouldn't be tarnished in my eyes, and they wouldn't feel ashamed."

II

The Story of Krishna, Arjuna, and the Beggar

One day, Lord Krishna and Arjuna were walking together through a path when they came across an old Brahmin beggar sitting by the roadside, looking miserable and pleading for alms.

Arjuna, filled with compassion upon seeing the poor man's condition, turned to Krishna and asked, "O Lord, why have You created beggars and poor people on this earth? Why must some suffer in poverty while others live in comfort?"

Krishna smiled gently but did not reply immediately.

Arjuna, moved by pity, called the beggar closer and gave him a large bag full of gold coins. He said kindly, "Take this gold. Use it wisely and do not beg anymore. Build a good life for yourself."

The beggar was overjoyed. He thanked Arjuna profusely, took the bag of gold, and went on his way, dreaming of a better

future — buying land, building a house, and living comfortably.

However, on his way home, the beggar was attacked by a robber in the forest. The thief snatched away all the gold coins and left him with nothing. Heartbroken and cursing his fate, the beggar returned to the same roadside the next day, once again begging for alms.

Arjuna and Krishna saw him again. Arjuna was surprised and felt even more pity. He inquired about what had happened. Upon learning the story, Arjuna gave the beggar a valuable diamond this time, saying, “Here, take this precious diamond. Sell it and use the money to start a new life. It should be enough to keep you secure.”

The beggar was ecstatic once more. But while crossing a river on his way, the diamond accidentally slipped from his hand and fell into the deep water. He searched desperately but could not recover it. Destitute again, he returned to begging at the same spot.

Arjuna was puzzled and disheartened. He wondered why his generous gifts had not helped the man escape poverty.

At that moment, Krishna stepped forward and gave the beggar just two small pennies (or two paise).

Arjuna was astonished. He asked Krishna, “My Lord, if a whole bag of gold and a valuable diamond could not change this man’s condition, what possible good can two mere pennies do?”

Krishna smiled and said, “Just watch.”

The beggar took the two pennies and walked away, still grumbling about his misfortune. Soon, he came across a fisherman who had just caught a fish. The fish was flapping desperately on the ground, struggling for life. The beggar thought to himself, “These two pennies cannot buy me a proper meal anyway. At least let me use them to save this creature’s life.”

He bought the fish with the two pennies and was about to release it back into the river when he noticed something stuck in the fish’s mouth. He removed the obstruction – and to his utter amazement, it was the very diamond he had lost earlier! Inside the fish, he also found the bag of gold coins that had been stolen from him.

Overjoyed and transformed, the beggar realised his fortune had returned. He thanked the heavens and went on to live a better life.

Later, Arjuna asked Krishna curiously, “O Lord, how is it that my gold and diamond could not help him, but Your two small pennies brought back everything?”

Krishna replied with deep wisdom:

“When you gave him the gold and the diamond, Arjuna, he thought only of his own needs and comforts. His mind remained focused on himself – hoarding and planning for his personal gain. That is why the wealth did not stay with him.

But when I gave him just two pennies, he put the needs of another living being (the struggling fish) before his own. In that moment of selfless compassion, he performed a truly kind act. When a person thinks of others’ pain and works to

relieve it, he is doing My work. And when someone does My work, how can I not take care of him?"

The Beautiful Lesson

This story teaches a profound humanitarian and spiritual message aligned with the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita:

Selfless compassion and helping others without expectation bring true blessings.

Mere material giving is not enough if the recipient (or even the giver) remains selfish.

When we prioritise the suffering of others, the universe (or divine grace) responds in miraculous ways.

True charity flows from the heart and creates positive karma that returns manifold.

The tale emphasises that thinking of others is the real path to receiving divine support, while self-centeredness keeps one trapped in cycles of loss.

III

ABU HURAIRA (RZ) AND PROPHET MOHAMMED PBUH

One day, all the Sahaba (companions) were sitting in Masjid an-Nabawi. Our beloved Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was giving them beautiful advice and beneficial reminders. A large number of people had gathered to listen to his hadiths.

At that moment, one of the Sahaba passed wind (farted), and a bad smell began to spread. As soon as our Prophet (PBUH) smelled it, he said: "Whoever has broken his wudu should go and perform wudu again."

(He reminded them that in Islam, passing farts breaks wudu, and one must renew their ablution before praying, entering the mosque, or reciting the Quran. Wudu is the washing of the hands, face, arms, and feet.)

No one stood up. After a while, one Sahabi stood up. His name was Abu Hurairah (Rz). He got up and said, “O Prophet of Allah, wouldn’t it be better if we all went together to perform wudu and come back?”

Upon hearing this, the eyes of our Prophet (PBUH) filled with tears. He said, “O Abu Hurairah (Rz), today in this large gathering, you have saved someone from feeling ashamed. By Allah, on the Day of Judgment, when all of humanity and all the Prophets will be present, Allah will not cause you to feel ashamed in front of them.”

This particular narration is popular in motivational Islamic circles. The core lesson, however — protecting a fellow human's honour and dignity in public — is very much in line with authentic Islamic teachings. The Prophet ﷺ greatly emphasised lowering the gaze from others’ faults and preserving people’s dignity.

The core lesson — protecting a fellow Muslim’s dignity and avoiding public embarrassment — is beautiful and fully in line with the Prophet’s teachings on mercy, good character, and preserving honour.

IV

Aranya Parva, Yaksha Prashna

During the 12th year of their exile in the forest (after losing their kingdom in the game of dice), the Pandavas were living in the woods of Dwaitavana. One day, while they rested under a banyan tree, a Brahmana approached them in distress. A deer had carried away his fire-kindling sticks (arani) on its antlers. The Pandavas pursued the deer to help him, but it vanished.

Exhausted, hungry, and thirsty, the brothers sat down. Yudhishtira asked Nakula to fetch water from a nearby lake. Nakula reached a crystal-clear lake but heard a voice warning him not to drink without answering questions. Ignoring the warning (thinking it was just a bird), he drank and fell dead.

Sahadeva, then Arjuna, and finally Bhima went one by one in search of their brothers. Each ignored the warning, drank the water, and died.

Yudhishtira, worried after a long wait, went himself. He found his four mighty brothers lying dead like fallen gods. Overcome with grief, he lamented deeply. As he prepared to drink from the lake, the same voice spoke: “I am a crane living on tiny fish. It is I who has slain your brothers for drinking without permission. Answer my questions first, or you too shall become the fifth corpse.”

Yudhishtira replied calmly: “Ask me your questions, and I shall answer to the best of my ability.”

The crane then revealed its true form as a Yaksha (a celestial being, later revealed to be Yama/Dharma, Yudhishtira's divine father in disguise). The Yaksha posed a long series of profound questions — around 125 in total — covering philosophy, ethics, dharma, life, death, human nature, and spirituality.

Yudhishtira answered every question with wisdom, humility, and deep insight. Impressed by his righteousness and knowledge, the Yaksha granted boons. Yudhishtira first chose to revive one brother. He thoughtfully selected Nakula (the son of his stepmother, Madri), explaining that Kunti (his own mother) already had a living son (himself), while Madri should also have one. The Yaksha, pleased by this impartial sense of justice, revived all four brothers.

The Yaksha then revealed himself as Dharma (the god of righteousness and Yudhishtira's father). He blessed the Pandavas, returned the Brahmana's fire-sticks, and granted additional boons, including that they would remain unrecognised during their 13th year of incognito exile.

The Yaksha's questions were not mere riddles but deep inquiries into dharma, human values, ethics, and the nature of life. Yudhishtira's answers reflect profound wisdom, compassion, and a balanced understanding of life. Here are some of the most beautiful and humanitarian ones:

Yaksha: What is heavier than the Earth?

Yudhishtira: A mother (her love, sacrifice, and importance in one's life).

Yaksha: What is higher than the heavens?

Yudhishtira: A father (his honour and place in life).

Yaksha: What is the highest duty in the world?

Yudhishtira: Compassion (or non-injury to all beings/ahimsa extended with kindness).

Yaksha: What is the best bath (purification)?

Yudhishtira: Cleansing the mind of impurities (inner purity over external rituals alone).

Yaksha: Who is truly happy?

Yudhishtira: One who has no debts, cooks his own simple food, and lives contentedly at home (or one who is free from anxiety and lives within his means).

Yaksha: What is the greatest wonder in the world?

Yudhishtira: Every day, countless creatures die and go to the abode of Yama, yet those who remain desire to live forever as if they are immortal. This is the greatest wonder.

Yaksha: What is the path (to liberation or righteousness)?

Yudhishtira: The path trodden by the great and righteous persons (mahajano yena gatah sa panthah – following the footsteps of the wise and virtuous).

Yaksha: What is ignorance?

Yudhishtira: Not knowing or ignoring one's own duties and responsibilities.

This episode beautifully showcases why Yudhishtira is called Dharmaraja — the king of righteousness. It teaches timeless lessons on wisdom, humanity, and family bonds

Tipu Sultan

As far as I remember, I was in the 4th standard. Our hostel housemaster was a rigorous teacher. He used to beat the students for the slightest infraction. Every house had a television, and the TV was on from 9 PM to 10 PM every night. Whenever TV time came, all the kids would get very excited and happy. In our house, there was a dormitory with 60-70 kids' beds. On the west side of the dormitory was the housemaster's room, which resembled a one-bedroom apartment where he lived with his wife and two children. As soon as you entered the housemaster's room, there was a hall, and in that hall was the TV. All the kids were made to sit in front of that TV to watch from 9 PM to 10 PM. On the east side of the dormitory, there was an open room called the standard room, where children played indoor games such as chess and carrom.

Since TV watching time was 9-10 PM, and there was only one channel back then, Doordarshan, all the kids knew the names of the TV shows, especially the serials that aired at that time. I recall that *Alif Laila* aired on Mondays, *Humrahi* on Tuesdays, and later it was replaced by *Jai Hanuman*. Wednesday was *Chitrahaar*, Thursday was *The Great Maratha*, Friday was *Chitrahaar* again, and Saturday was *Tipu Sultan*. *The Tipu Sultan* serial aired on Saturday from 10-11 PM, rather than its usual 9-10 PM time slot on Monday to Friday. *Tipu Sultan* was a very famous serial back then.

Everyone, including the housemaster, eagerly waited for it. On Saturdays, all the kids were happy from morning until night, no matter how much scolding or beating they received in class. The excitement surrounding *Tipu Sultan* made everyone tolerant of everything.

As soon as we finished dinner on Saturday nights, all the kids would pray they wouldn't feel sleepy before 10 PM. While the housemaster prayed, they would all fall asleep before 10 PM so he could enjoy *Tipu Sultan* with his family. Our housemaster tried hard to get the kids to sleep or at least feel sleepy before 10 PM, but they wouldn't! They'd been waiting for this since morning. As soon as 10 PM struck, all the kids would line up in front of the housemaster's room. From the line, the kids were made to sit in the hall in front of the TV. The moment *Tipu Sultan* started, all the kids' faces would light up with joy. But the housemaster's face would show worry—he wanted us to go to sleep soon.

Then our housemaster came up with a new technique. During the serial, if any boy blinked, yawned, or had watery eyes, he would immediately pull them up, send them out, and say, "You're sleepy, go to bed." If the kids refused to leave, they'd get beaten and chased away. Within 10 minutes, half the hall would be empty. The remaining kids realised that even blinking would get them sent out, so they stopped blinking altogether. Because they stared at the TV continuously, their eyes would start to water. As soon as the housemaster saw tears in anyone's eyes, he'd tell them to get up and go to bed. If they refused, they'd get beaten.

It was a hilarious memory! The housemaster's tactics to clear the room and the kids' determination to watch Tipu Sultan without blinking make for such a funny story.

In this way, within 15-20 minutes, the housemaster would kick all the kids out of his room, turn off the dormitory lights, and watch TV with his family. He would lock his room's door, switch off the room's lights, and enjoy the Tipu Sultan serial. Meanwhile, we kids outside were desperate for even a glimpse of Tipu Sultan. The kids were so restless that they tried to catch a glimpse of the TV to figure out what was happening in the serial. Luckily, the kids discovered a small hole in the housemaster's door through which the TV was clearly visible. Now, the kids took turns peeking through that hole to watch Tipu Sultan. Every minute, a different kid would take over the hole. Sometimes a kid would hog the hole for two minutes straight, not budge. Doing this was considered a crime at the time. If caught, that kid would get a thrashing and be banned from peeking through the hole.

When a scuffle broke out outside over whose turn it was at the hole, the whispers and commotion would reach the housemaster inside. He would realise the kids hadn't gone to sleep yet. To check what the kids were up to, he would also use the same hole, peeking from inside to outside to see what they were doing. While the housemaster looked out through the hole, the kids outside were trying to look in. Suddenly, when the housemaster peeked out, the kids outside couldn't see anything on the TV—just darkness. The kids would become confused, wondering where this sudden darkness had come from. Before they could figure it out, the housemaster would abruptly open the door and find all the students

gathered in front of it. Everyone would get a thorough beating, and, crying and cursing the housemaster, the kids would go to sleep.

For five to six months, things went on like this. The house master had become the villain of our lives. Not a single boy escaped his beatings. When our tolerance reached its limit, the fourth-class boys made a plan on the games ground. The class monitor said, “Guys, this sir has made our lives miserable; what should we do about him?” One suggested, “Let’s complain to the principal.” Another said, “No, if we complain, he’ll take it out on us even more.” A third said, “Let’s talk to the principal and change houses.” A fourth said, “We’ll argue with sir.” Then one boy said, “Guys, I have a great idea that no one else has thought of.” Excited, everyone asked, “What is it?” He said, “I know black magic. I learned it from my grandfather.” We asked, “Will he turn black?” He laughed, “You guys are crazy; you don’t know what black magic is.” We admitted we didn’t, as it was the first time we’d heard the term. He explained, “It’s a mantra-tantra that will make him die.” A wave of joy swept through us. Everyone said in unison, “What? Will he die? Wow...” Just hearing it felt like we were already at his funeral. He continued, “Yes, he’ll die, and no one will suspect us. They’ll think he died of a heart attack.” Everyone said, “Then why delay? Let’s do it!” He replied, “It’s not that simple. We need a lot of things—lemon, Kumkum, needles, a candle, and more.” We said, “This is a hostel; where will we get all this stuff?” One added, “It’ll cost money too; where will we get that?” So, we decided to pool our available funds. Every boy emptied his pockets, and together we collected 20 rupees for this noble cause. Then we approached the aunt who cleaned our dormitory. After much

pleading, she agreed and brought all the items the next day. For us kids, this was a thrilling new experience. Everyone wanted to see what would happen and how. The boy said, "Tonight at 12, we'll perform the ritual. No one sleeps!" Everyone agreed, "Yes, your highness!" Night fell, most kids slept, but we stayed awake for our "black magic operation," excited that tomorrow's sunrise would bring us joy. At midnight, all the class boys gathered in the common room. We sat in a circle, and the boy sat in the centre with all the items. He lit the candle, wrote the sir's name on the lemon, pierced it with needles, and softly chanted some mantras. After a while, he said, "Now we'll throw this lemon into sir's room." We tiptoed behind him, threw the lemon through his window, and ran back to our beds. Overjoyed at the success of our mission and eager to hear of Sir's death, we fell asleep quickly. The sleep was deep until a sharp whack of a stick hit our backsides. Rubbing our eyes and backsides, we woke to see our house master, stick in hand, standing like Ravana himself at 5 a.m., as usual, waking us for exercise. Our minds couldn't process it. Was this him or his ghost? Was I dreaming, or was he in my dream? Another sharp whack snapped us out of it. We hurriedly got up for morning exercise. Everyone glared at the boy who'd wasted our one or two rupees on this black magic nonsense. We surrounded him, demanding our money back. He apologised, saying, "Looks like I messed up the mantra."

“Yatha Guru Tatha Shishya”

I don't understand how a teacher can be communal. When a teacher is communal, the education they impart will reflect that bias. There's a well-known Sanskrit verse, “Yatha Guru Tatha Shishya, meaning "As the teacher, so the disciple." Teaching and medicine are considered noble professions, and professionals in these fields are taught never to be communal. A communal teacher will push society toward communalism, and a communal doctor might even take a life. In my career, I've taught many topics involving religion or caste, like in Class 7's topic 'On Equality', which includes examples of Mr and Mrs Ansari, who were denied a flat due to their religion, and Om Prakash Valmiki, a Dalit writer who faced caste-based discrimination in childhood, as described in his autobiography 'Joothan'. In the same class's history book, there's a lesson titled 'Devotional Paths to the Divine' that discusses different paths to God. In Class 10's political science book, the topic 'Gender, Caste, and Religion' details various inequalities. While teaching these topics, religion and caste inevitably come up, and every teacher must ensure discussions remain free of communal bias and avoid fostering such attitudes in students. As educators in a secular country, we must remain secular, guide students and society toward secularism, and uphold the nation's secular fabric. We should highlight the positive aspects of every religion. I often begin this topic with a couplet: “*Najane kaise log nafrat karte hai, hame to mohobbat ke liye bhi ye zindagi kam pad jati hai.*” Meaning “I

don't know how people find time to hate, when even a lifetime feels too short for love."

I also remember a couplet that it reflects a philosophical tone.

The lines are:

"Duniya badi kam ki cheez hai, hame jeena nahi aaya.

Yahan har cheez mein nasha hai, hame peena nahi aaya."

Meaning

"The world is a trivial thing; we haven't learned how to live.

There's intoxication in everything here; we haven't learned how to drink."

This couplet conveys a profound reflection on life, suggesting that, despite its transience or insignificance, the world is full of allure and temptation. Yet, the speaker feels unskilled in embracing or navigating its pleasures and challenges. If you were looking to connect this to the earlier discussion on teaching and secularism, it could metaphorically highlight the complexity of life's distractions (like communalism) and the need for wisdom to live meaningfully, aligning with a teacher's role in guiding students toward clarity and unity.

I always share examples from my own life. My parents, being orthodox Muslims, chose a non-Muslim Gurukul-style residential school for my education. From kindergarten to Class 10, I studied in a non-Muslim residential school. My parents never let religion come in the way of education. Not only I, but also four other members of my family studied at that school. It was only after leaving hostel life post-Class 10 that we learned the Quran. Before that, we memorised many

shlokas, like '*Vakratunda Mahakaya Suryakoti Samaprabha*', which we recited daily. It never occurred to us to question why we were reciting them, nor did our parents. Every year, a jatra would take place at the temple near our school, and we students would be taken there to clean it. While cleaning, we never thought about why we were doing it; we did it happily. As NCC students, we stood outside the temple during the jatra, breaking coconuts for pilgrims. In the evening, we returned with prasad. During Ganesh Chaturthi, our art teacher made clay Ganesha idols, and we helped him. It never occurred to us to question why we were doing these things. How can someone raised in such an environment be communal or make others communal?

I often tell my students that nature is the same for everyone. For example, when it rains, it rains on all, not just on a specific religious group. We've never read in any newspaper that rain is expected only for people of a particular religion. Rain falls on everyone equally. The sun is one, giving light to all humanity, and everyone benefits from it. If gods were different for each group, each god would create a separate sun, moon, water with various tastes or colours, air with different fragrances, or even entirely separate worlds for each religion. If gods were different, human faces, physical features, and blood would differ. Some might be green, others orange or white. If someone meets with an accident and loses a lot of blood, in an emergency, the doctor doesn't ask for their blood group but their religion, and only people of the same religion would donate blood. But that's not how it works. Today, doctors ask for blood types, not religious affiliations. In a blood bank, you'll see a patient from one religion receiving

blood from someone of another religion or a patient from an upper caste receiving blood from a lower caste. The blood bank is the only place where religion and caste don't matter; the only priority is saving a life, and who can help do it. Nature constantly reminds us that we are all one. Every human is born, and every human dies. If gods were different, some god would have created followers who never die.

Shankar Dayal Sharma and Sultan Qaboos Bin Said of Oman

The story of Shankar Dayal Sharma and Sultan Qaboos bin Said of Oman is one of deep respect and personal connection, rooted in their teacher-student relationship during Qaboos's youth. Sultan Qaboos, born in 1940, was sent by his father, Sultan Said bin Taimur (an alumnus of Mayo College, Ajmer), to study in Pune, India, at around age 12. There, he was privately tutored by Shankar Dayal Sharma, who later became the ninth President of India (1992–1997). Although some sources claim that Qaboos studied at a private institution in Pune, the specifics about the institution or duration are unclear, and one account questions whether Sharma was teaching in Pune at the time, as he was practising law in Uttar Pradesh.

This early bond left a lasting impression on Qaboos, who regarded Sharma as his guru. In 1994 (or 1996, per some sources), when Sharma visited Muscat as India's President, Sultan Qaboos broke protocol in a remarkable display of respect. Typically, the Sultan did not personally receive dignitaries at the airport, but he made an exception for Sharma. Qaboos not only greeted him at the airport but reportedly climbed the stairs to escort Sharma from his seat and personally drove him from the airport, setting aside his usual driver. When asked why he broke protocol, Qaboos reportedly said, "I did not go to the airport to pick up Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma, the President of India, but to receive my guru, Dr Sharma, who taught me in Pune."

Ignacy Jan Paderewski and Herbert Hoover

The story of Ignacy Jan Paderewski and Herbert Hoover is a popular tale of kindness and reciprocity, though its details are debated. In 1892, Herbert Hoover, an 18-year-old Stanford University student, struggled to pay his fees. To raise funds, he and a friend organised a concert featuring the renowned Polish pianist Ignacy Jan Paderewski, agreeing to a \$2,000 fee. The concert failed to sell enough tickets, raising only \$1,600. Hoover presented the amount to Paderewski along with a promissory note for the remaining \$400. According to some versions, Paderewski, moved by the students' plight, either returned the \$1,600, telling Hoover to cover costs and keep a small profit, or tore up the note, forgiving the debt.

Years later, during World War I, Poland faced starvation. Paderewski, then Prime Minister of Poland in 1919, sought aid from the U.S. Food and Relief Administration, led by Herbert Hoover. Hoover swiftly organised massive food shipments, feeding millions and averting disaster. When Paderewski thanked him, some accounts claim Hoover referenced the earlier kindness, saying, "You helped me when I was a student in a hole."

The story, while heartwarming, likely embellishes a less dramatic truth. Hoover and Paderewski met multiple times, including in 1915 and during the 1919 Paris Peace

Conference, and their friendship spanned decades, as evidenced by Hoover's visit to Paderewski in Geneva in 1938. While Hoover's humanitarian efforts in Poland are well-documented, including the provision of 700,000 coats and shoes for children in 1919, the concert tale remains unverified by primary sources. It persists as a symbol of mutual generosity, but critical examination suggests it may be more of a legend than a fact.

Ajay

It was my first residential school. For residential kids, the school is their home, classmates are like siblings, and teachers are like parents. Ajay was in the 8th grade. When I started talking to him, I learned that his mother raised him alone. I didn't have the courage to ask whether she was a widow or divorced, but I heard from friends that his uncle had paid her fees. Keeping this in mind, I began giving personal attention to his studies. All the boys in the hostel stayed in a dormitory, and I had a room attached to it. After school, I'd rest in my room while the kids went to play games, but Ajay wouldn't go. He'd come and sit with me. He was average in his studies. He could manage my subject, but in math and science—subjects parents focus on these days—he was below average. I casually asked why he didn't improve in math and science. I pointed out that since it's a hostel, all teachers live here, which is an advantage—you can approach any teacher at any time to clear your doubts. He said, "Sir, I'm scared of the math teacher." When I asked why, he said, "Sir, he hits a lot." I told him to clear his doubts before getting hit. He replied, "When I ask doubts, he hits me, saying not to disturb during class and to ask afterwards." I said, "Then ask after class." He said, "When I go after class, he says, 'What were you doing when I was teaching?' and starts hitting." So, out of fear, he stays quiet in class and afterwards. I told him, "If you're scared of the teacher, ask the top students in your class. If you stay silent, you'll fall behind. Asking doubts is your right, and clearing

them is the teacher's duty. If you keep quiet, how will you become a doctor or engineer?" He said, "Sir, I don't want to be a doctor or engineer." I asked, "Then what's your aim in life?" He said, "Sir, I want to be a cricketer." I said, "If you want to be a cricketer, you need to play. During game time, you stay in the hostel, like now. Why don't you play? You want to be a cricketer but waste time chatting—how will that make you a cricketer?" I explained, "If your thinking is positive, like wanting to be a cricketer or doctor, but your actions are negative, the result will be negative. You've studied math, that plus and minus equals minus. If a farmer thinks positively about growing crops but only sleeps, that negative action won't grow crops. Just thinking doesn't grow crops—you need hard work. Positive thinking alone isn't enough; it needs positive actions for positive results and a positive life." After hearing this, he said, "Sir, I really want to go play, but I have corns on my feet, so I can barely walk. It hurts to walk, so running is even harder." Hearing about corns reminded me of my brother, an MBBS doctor. I'd seen him remove corns at home with positive results. He'd taught me how to remove corns and apply an Ayurvedic medicine. When Ajay mentioned corns, I asked to see his feet. I was shocked—while I'd seen one or two corns on others' feet, Ajay had over 30 on his right foot and 20 on his left, all in the early stages. Seeing so many felt strange and gross; I didn't want to look. That Sunday, I went home, and by chance, my brother was there. I told him everything, and he said, "You know how to remove corns—I taught you. Do it carefully." He added that if so many corns worsened, it could be serious. I decided to remove Ajay's corns and guide him toward his goal of becoming a cricketer. Back at the hostel, I told Ajay, "Skip evening classes today; I'll

remove your corns.” Over two days, I removed all his corns and applied the Ayurvedic medicine my brother recommended. Within 10 days, both his feet healed, and the other kids were shocked. They said, “Sir, you’re not just a teacher but a doctor too!” I laughed, “Not a doctor, but definitely a doctor’s brother.” From that day, I never saw Ajay stay back during game time. He was thrilled. On Raksha Bandhan, his mother visited, and he introduced me to her. She was overjoyed about his corns and thanked me. I said, “You’re the first parent, I’m the second; our job is to help him reach his goal.” A few days later, the 8th-grade final exams happened, and preparations for 9th grade began. Ajay said, “Sir, I’m thinking of taking a TC and joining a cricket academy in Bangalore.”

I told him, “Why not, absolutely? You get one life, fulfil all your dreams.” Then he said, “Sir, I’m alone. My mom isn’t very educated. I don’t have a dad. How can I fulfil my dreams alone?” In response, I told him, “The person who dares to dream, God gives them the strength to make those dreams come true.” I recited a few lines from a poem I wrote: “Now that you’re close to your destination, why have the caravans stopped? Look at your talent, and complete the journey. “He was motivated. He was happy.

One fine day, he called his mother and uncle, told them to apply for a Transfer Certificate (TC), and shared his dreams. He said he would now pursue his dreams by joining a cricket academy in Bangalore. His parents came. Ajay was the only son, the sole support for his mother, but she encouraged him to chase his dreams. They applied for the TC.

I recall being in my classroom, teaching, when the peon came and said, "Sir, the principal is calling you." I left my class midway and went to the principal's office. When I reached the scene, it was intense. The principal's face was furious, his anger palpable. Ajay's mother and uncle were sitting in front of him. Ajay was sitting on a sofa in the back, crying, with a torn shirt. After a minute's pause, the principal said, "Sami Sir, take him outside and ask why he needs the TC."

I already knew everything, but following the principal's orders, I took Ajay outside and asked, "What happened?" Ajay said, "Sir, when I applied for the TC, the principal hit me. He asked why I needed it, and I told him I don't want to study; I want to become a cricketer. In anger, he hit me, tore my shirt, and my mother is crying seeing me get beaten like this."

I calmed him down and said, "Don't worry, what's done is done. The principal only wanted to hit you once, and he's done it. He won't touch you now. For your dreams, you can handle this much, bear it." He wiped his tears, gathered courage, and nodded.

I went back to the principal's cabin and said, "Sir, Ajay wants to be a cricketer, so he needs the TC to join an academy to fulfil his dream." In anger, the principal gave him the TC and said, "Go to hell." Ajay happily took the TC, touched my feet for blessings, and left to chase his dreams.

*"Uthana Khud Hi Padta Hai Thaka Toota Badan Apna,
Ke Jub Tak Sans Chalti Hai Koi Kandha Nahi Deta."*

A year later, I resigned from that school and joined another school in Telangana. For a year, I had no contact with Ajay. I didn't know where he went, how he was doing, whether he

made it to Bangalore—nothing. Then, a year later, the havoc of COVID-19 hit, and everyone was confined to their homes. During that time, out of the blue, I got a message from Ajay on WhatsApp. It read, “Hello, Sir, how are you? I’m Ajay, and I hope you remember me. I have joined an academy in Bangalore. I played Under-15 too. Sir, thank you so much for helping me bring my dreams closer. I’m very happy with my life today. If my dad were here, he would’ve been so proud. Right now, due to COVID, I’m back home, but I go to the stadium every morning to keep up my practice.”

I replied, “You’re happy, I’m happy. God bless you, and one day I want to see you in our cricket team.” He said, “Sure, Sir, that’s my promise.”

A week passed. I was busy taking online classes from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. for four different schools across India, so my schedule was hectic. During this time, I couldn’t stay in touch with Ajay—maybe he was busy chasing his dreams too. One day, I remember it was a Sunday, and I was still in bed at around 8 a.m. A classmate of Ajay’s, Baswaraj, called me and said, “Sir, have you heard the news?” I asked, “What news?” Baswaraj said, “Sir, Ajay passed away.”

I couldn’t comprehend it. I asked, “Which Ajay?” He said, “Sir, Ajay, our classmate, is your student.” I asked, “How? What happened?” He said, “Sir, he went swimming with his friends in a canal this morning and didn’t come out.” I said, “You’re joking, right?” He sent me a video on WhatsApp of the police pulling Ajay’s body out of the canal. His mother was sitting nearby, crying. I was stunned.

His words kept echoing in my mind: “Sir, I will fulfil my dreams.” I remembered him crying in the principal’s cabin, the tears I wiped away, the feet he touched for blessings, and his message from just a week ago, still on my WhatsApp. I couldn’t believe he was gone.

Children also have dreams. Parents and teachers are the ones who can understand their dreams and motivate them toward achieving them. Throughout my teaching career, I have noticed a distinct pattern: children can be divided into two distinct types. The first type are those children who know themselves well—they know what they are good at, where they are weak, what they want to do, and what they don’t want to do. The second type are those children who don’t know much about themselves, who they are, or what they should do in life. They depend on their parents or friends for everything. They follow what others do; whatever their friends do, they do the same. Ajay belonged to the first category. He knew what he wanted to do but lacked motivation. Sometimes, children who know what they want to do are unable to express their plans due to fear of their parents. They end up doing what their parents want, not what they desire, and get stuck in life, neither able to pursue what they genuinely want nor able to do what they are doing wholeheartedly.

Homework

Aniket, a 9th-grade boy, is his mother's only son. His mother, a nurse in a government hospital, worked hard to get him admitted to a reputed school in their area. Aniket goes to school daily, is very punctual and regular, keeps to himself, has no enemies, and has very few friends. He is very selective about who he chooses as friends. He takes excellent care of his mother, massaging her feet at night and helping with all her chores. He never raises his voice with her, maintains self-discipline, does his homework independently, and never receives complaints from school. His mother has instilled good values in him. One day, a teacher gave their class homework to go home and say "I love you" to their parents, who do so much for them, either in writing or orally, as the children chose. The next day, there was a picnic, so, in the excitement, the teacher thought of giving the children an entertaining homework assignment away from books.

The teacher also said, "Tomorrow is your picnic, so I'll ask you at the picnic about what your parents' reactions were after you said 'I love you' to them, so be ready." Aniket was excited about the picnic with his three friends, and they all sat together to plan it. They made a plan to divide the responsibilities among themselves: one friend would bring gravy and vegetables for everyone, another would bring chapati and rice, and the third would bring sweets and cold drinks. Similarly, they divided

the items needed for games. Aniket was assigned to bring sweets for everyone.

Happily, Aniket came home and told his mother, "Mom, we have a picnic tomorrow, and my only responsibility is to bring sweets for everyone, nothing else." His mother said, "Alright, let's make the sweets." Aniket suggested, "Mom, there are a lot of carrots in the market, so why don't we make gajar ka halwa? It'll be economical for you too." His mother agreed. Both mother and son went shopping; Aniket bought all the items needed for his games and new clothes, and they also purchased carrots before returning home. Aniket stayed busy preparing for the picnic, while his mother started grating the carrots. She wanted to finish half the work that night, so Aniket wouldn't be late in the morning. At 5 a.m., both woke up; Aniket went to bathe, and his mother went to the kitchen to finish making the gajar ka halwa. By 7 a.m., the halwa was ready. At 7:30 a.m., the bus arrived. Aniket was ready and entered the kitchen to grab his tiffin. In a hurry, he said a quick goodbye to his mother, took the tiffin, and rushed toward the bus. Just as he stepped out of the house, he remembered his teacher's homework. Turning back, he returned to the kitchen where his mother was busy cleaning.

Aniket stood at the kitchen door, looking at his mother with teary eyes. When his mother saw him back in the kitchen, she was shocked, thinking the bus was waiting outside and he was still here. She asked, "What happened? Why haven't you left?" Aniket, without saying a word, just kept staring at her. She asked again, "What do you need? Should I make something else? Do you need money? What's wrong? Why aren't you saying anything? Don't you want to go to the picnic? Do you

want to have breakfast?” Before she could finish her questions, Aniket suddenly hugged her tightly and said, “Mom, you are the best mother in the world. You never let me feel that I’m an orphan or that I don’t have a dad. Mom, you are the best mother in the world. I love you.” Saying this, he kissed her forehead, wiped his tears, and left. His mother couldn’t quite understand what had just happened. She felt a sense of peace, and all her fatigue vanished. Tears welled up in her eyes as well. Looking at her late husband’s picture, she thought to herself, “If only you were alive, you would have been so proud to see our well-mannered son.” She lingered in that emotional moment for a while, then decided, “Just as my son made me happy with his words today, I’ll make his favourite dishes to surprise him when he returns this evening. He’ll be thrilled to see all his favourite foods.” With this thought, she took leave from her job, bought all the necessary ingredients from the market, and got to work on “Operation Dinner.”

After preparing the delicious dinner, the mother was now eagerly waiting for her child to return. The joy that her child had given her with just two words (“I love you, Mom”), she now wanted to return to her child with joys many times greater. The mother thought: as soon as the child comes back from the picnic, I will hug him tightly, then feed him mouthfuls with my own hands.

She hadn't even thoroughly shaken off these thoughts when she received a call from the school management. They said the bus had an accident on the way back. All the children have been admitted to the nearby hospital. Some children have

taken their last breath. Please come quickly and receive your child.

In that moment, her heart stopped as if forever; the world turned pitch black and every breath choked in her throat.

The only sound echoing inside her was “my son is gone,” like a knife twisting slowly, endlessly, deep in her chest.

She tried to scream, but no voice came, only an ocean of tears that poured without pause and would never stop.

The ground slipped away from under her feet, her knees buckled, and she fell helplessly, calling her child’s name into the empty air.

With every breath, her soul burned, as though they had taken not just her son but her own life along with him.

From that second, she merely existed, no longer alive; every heartbeat became a punishment that would never end.

She rushed to the hospital, clinging to a single fragile hope in her heart: that he was only injured, that her child was still breathing.

But the moment she reached, everyone lowered their eyes and said softly, “Aniket is no more.”

In that instant, the world collapsed into silence; only a mother remained, surrounded by memories of her son and those last words still ringing in her ears.

She could still feel the warmth of his small arms wrapped around her neck when he had hugged her before leaving.

Now there was nothing left but that fading sensation on her skin and the echo of his voice saying “I love you, Ma,” playing over and over like a wound that would never close.

Adil - Sahil

In the initial years of my teaching career, there was a strange rule in one school. If any boy arrived late, he had to pay a 50-rupee fine. If he didn't wear the school uniform, he would be fined 200 rupees. If he didn't wear shoes, he would be fined 50 rupees. If any part of the uniform was missing, he had to pay a fine. In that school, there was a test in the first period every morning. A test was held every day for 20 marks, but each day it was for a different subject. At the end of the month, the marks from all the weeks were added up for each subject to calculate the monthly marks, and then the total marks from all subjects were used to determine the percentage. At the beginning of each month, the children were given a target—for example, to achieve 80% in the upcoming month. If a student failed to achieve it, he had to pay 2000 rupees. At the end of the month, if the child didn't meet the given percentage, he had to pay 2000 rupees. He was then told to achieve the target for the next month, and if he did, the amount would be refunded. But if the child failed to accomplish the next month's target as well, he had to pay another 2000 rupees. Moreover, the principal would call each subject teacher to her cabin and instruct them that, under no circumstances, should the child achieve the target. She would subtly deduct marks so the child wouldn't meet the target, ensuring the school continued to profit every month.

When I realised that the school only looks out for its own benefit and imposes fines on students for even the most minor things, one day I told the children, "If you all come in proper uniform, you people will look smart. What's the difficulty in wearing the complete uniform?"

Then I said, "From today, we will make every effort to wear the complete uniform and make ourselves look smart. If anyone has any problems buying uniform accessories, tell me—I will pay for them myself. Once you buy those accessories, the fines will stop forever. Instead of paying fines daily, purchase the thing that's missing because of which you're getting fined, and get rid of paying fines forever. I will help you in this."

There were 4 sections in class 10. I told them, "Whichever section comes in complete uniform first, I will throw a party for them at my house." I gave them 3 months' time and said, "This is the month of June; until August, I will observe which section's students start coming in complete uniform the soonest, and as soon as the 3 months are over, on Teachers' Day in September, I will give the treat to that particular section." And the countdown began.

Every day, I would notice a few changes in the students. In the first month, about 25% of the students started wearing the uniform correctly. I financially helped some students to buy their uniform accessories. Gradually, two months passed. My daily motivation began to affect the children—they realised that by wearing the full uniform, they no longer had to pay fines every day and could enter the school with complete confidence.

The management was also amazed to see the discipline among the children; the fine collection had now reduced significantly. For some students, I personally stitched buttons onto their uniforms by hand—I always kept a needle and thread in my bag. I also had to carry a nail cutter at all times to trim the students' nails right then and there, so they wouldn't have to pay fines. Even a polish and a brush for their shoes.

Gradually, over those 3 months, 99% of the class started coming in full uniform. There were only two children who, despite seeing all this, never made any effort to wear the uniform properly. I didn't want to be overly strict—where I could get things done with love, there was no room for strictness.

One day, I arrived at school early in the morning, went into one of the classes, and sat down, waiting for the students. As the children slowly entered the classroom, seeing them in full uniform filled me with indescribable happiness. I was thrilled; I felt that the children were changing.

Suddenly, I saw a student without a uniform—he was wearing coloured clothes. The 3 months were over. I got extremely angry. Before assembly, when that boy entered the class and was just taking off his bag, I went up to him and punished him so hard that his face turned red. The entire class saw me angry for the first time; no one had ever seen my fierce side before.

I shouted at him like never before, and he kept crying the whole day. Even after 3 periods, he was still crying when I checked. His name was Adil, and he was also my favourite

student. You have higher expectations of a favourite student—I had hoped he would be the first to act on my words, but when only disappointment came from him, I lost control.

We used to sit together and have lunch every day. That day, I thought that from now on, Adil would never talk to me again or have lunch with me. Just thinking about this made me feel guilty.

Lunch time came. I saw him from a distance—he was still crying. I was sitting quietly outside the class. With those teary eyes, he came close to me, wiped his tears, and said, "Sir, let's go eat." Hearing this, tears welled up in my eyes. My vision blurred with tears.

The one I had hit so hard—despite that, the fact that he still came to me and invited me to eat made me cry.

We sat down to eat. He was crying while looking at me, and seeing him, I couldn't hold back my own tears. The next day, I saw him (Adil) in complete uniform.

Now only one boy was left—his name was Sahil.

Sahil was very good at studies and was the dominant kid in the class. He had two best friends who he heavily influenced—they would do whatever he said.

Sahil and his two other friends got new uniforms stitched and wore them correctly, but they refused to tuck their shirts into their pants.

I explained to them many times that just wearing clothes isn't a big deal, but wearing them properly is. Everyone should have a sense of style.

In a very friendly manner, I told them: "These pants and shirt aren't Indian attire; it's British attire introduced by the British. We should learn how to wear it properly from them because it's their tradition. If we wear an Indian kurta-pyjama and tuck the kurta into the pyjama, or tie it, would it look good? People would laugh. In the same way, if we wear pants and shirts or formals but don't tuck the shirt in, people will laugh at us too."

Even after explaining so much, Sahil said, "Sir, we have taken a vow among ourselves that until we finish class 10, we will not tuck our shirts in. You can expel us from school or give us a TC if you want."

I stayed silent, didn't argue, and just started observing them.

Because of Sahil, his two other friends in the group also stopped tucking in their shirts.

The good thing was that they at least started properly wearing the full uniform, otherwise.

I was waiting, knowing that sooner or later they would start doing it, because now only these three boys were left—the rest of class 10 were tucking their shirts in.

One day, after lunch, I had a period in Sahil's class. I entered, and the students hadn't fully settled down yet.

While the kids settled in, I sat in the chair and started stroking my beard.

Sahil and his group immediately started imitating me—they too began stroking their (non-existent) beards.

The moment I saw this, it was as if lightning struck inside me. In a fit of anger, I went up to them and started shouting.

My voice was so loud that the principal and the rest of the staff came running, and everyone started looking at me. I looked toward the principal and the other teachers and said, “These students have been studying here since first grade. Now they’re in tenth, and they still haven’t learned how to wear their uniform properly. How have you managed to keep such ill-mannered students in your school until now? The entire school is in proper uniform today—except for these three.”

I told the principal, “Ma’am, either these students will stay in the school, or I will. Either give them their Transfer Certificates or accept my resignation letter.”

I continued, “If, despite having so many teachers, these students haven’t learned basic manners after all these years, then this school can’t really be called a school, and these teachers can’t really be called teachers.”

The teachers said, “Sir, please don’t argue with these kids. Their families are even worse than they are. They come from a completely rowdy background—that’s why we avoid mentioning their names.”

I replied, “If a student comes to school and still remains undisciplined, then whose fault is that? A patient goes to a hospital to get better. If he recovers, we call it a hospital; but if he falls even sicker there, can we still call it a hospital? Likewise, if a child keeps behaving badly even after coming to school, then which teacher here has truly fulfilled their role as a teacher?”

Seeing my anger, the three students were made to stand outside, and the principal said, “You won’t enter the class again unless Sir gives you permission.”

Evening came, school was over, and everyone went home. I went home too.

The next day, I saw the same three students standing outside the classroom again. I remained silent. On the third day, they came to me and apologised. By then, my anger had cooled down. I allowed them to enter the class, but made one thing clear to myself—that as long as those three stayed in the school, I wouldn’t even look at their faces.

A month passed. They started coming to school in uniform, but still didn’t tuck in their shirts.

One day, as usual, I reached school quite early. Since no other students had arrived yet, the classes were completely empty. I often come to school early, partly because the empty classrooms make me feel like I’m in a singing studio. The way my voice echoes in those empty rooms helps me understand the sur (notes) better, and singing feels really good. So I just sit there humming to myself.

That day too, I was sitting and humming as per my habit. Suddenly, a student came and passed by in front of my class. I recognised him — it was Sahil. I ignored him. Then he passed by my class again, this time looking straight at me. He clearly wanted me to notice that for the first time today, he had tucked his shirt in. I had noticed, but I still pretended not to.

When he realised I was deliberately ignoring him, he walked into my class himself, greeted me, and I replied. Then he said,

“Sir, today for the first time we have tucked in our shirt... and sir, we did it only for you.

We had taken a vow to never tuck in our shirts for the rest of our lives. But today, after 9 years, we broke that vow ourselves and that too only for you, sir.

Since childhood, we have never tucked in our shirts, sir. We never liked tucking it in; that’s why we never did. Today, for the first time, we tucked it in – only and only for you, sir and today we have also taken a new vow – that from today onwards we will always keep our shirt tucked in and always stay disciplined, sir.” Hearing all this, tears came to my eyes.

He continued, "Sir, till today, no teacher has ever come who emphasises discipline this much or has done so. Here, teachers actually want us not to wear a complete uniform so the school can keep fining us again and again and benefit from it. You are the first teacher in our lives who has truly paid attention to children's discipline. From you, we have understood what discipline really is and its importance. Thank you, sir, for this. We hurt your feelings with our joking – we are really sorry. Please forgive us."

I also became emotional and said, "See, if there are 10 children in a class and I give each one a neem leaf and ask them to taste it and tell me whether the leaf is sweet or bitter – and out of 10, 8 children say it's bitter while only 2 say it's sweet – then tell me, where is the problem? In those 8 boys, in the leaf itself, or in those 2 boys?"

Sahil said, "In those two boys."

I said, "Exactly. In the same way, properly and systematically wearing a uniform is something everyone understands – only you three didn't get it. So where was the problem?"

He said, "Sir, the problem was in us."

Then I asked, "So tell me, now that you're in full uniform today, who looks smarter – you guys or me?"

He said, "Sir, we do."

Then I said, "Always take criticism positively. It's the critics who make you better. Today, you made an effort to change yourself – that's the biggest thing. Sometimes in schools, teachers want to improve the children, but the children don't care about those good teachers. And sometimes children want a good teacher who can guide them properly, but they don't get such teachers. Applause requires two hands.

I tried to bring you all into proper discipline. If you didn't want it, even if I wanted to, I couldn't have done anything. Today, you yourselves thought, 'I need to change, and you changed. So always remember: internal motivation is far more important than external motivation.

We are together only for a short time. Even parents won't be with you your whole life. The remaining journey of life will have to be lived on your own strength, through self-motivation.

I also said, 'A teacher never wishes ill for his students. I haven't kept anything in my heart – you don't either. If I said something in anger, forgive me for that, too. And today you have taken a pledge – hold on to it firmly.'"

Cake of Sorry

Often, after school ended, I had this habit of walking to the bus stop. Some students would also walk with me. Along the way, we would discuss our daily routine, and I would also share some valuable insights with them. This became a daily routine.

At first, I used to walk alone, but gradually more and more people joined, and it became a small group. There was some fun and laughter on the way too, but mostly we talked about useful things—or you could say, Gyan (wisdom/knowledge). In this way, I developed a really nice bond with those kids.

One day, while I was teaching, a lady teacher suddenly entered and, crying, began complaining about some children. Madam said, “Sir, yesterday some children verbally abused me. They passed some objectionable comments on me that I can't even share in front of you.”

I was shocked to hear this. The second blow came when Madam said, “The boy who said this is often seen going with you in the evening.”

As soon as I heard that, it felt like the ground had slipped from under my feet. It seemed as though Madam was implying that the children had become like this because they had been staying with me, or that I had provoked them into saying such things. I got very nervous.

Hearing the madam's words, her crying, and her loud voice, many other teachers gathered there. In front of everyone, Madam repeated the whole thing again.

I told Madam that I would speak with the children personally and asked her to provide the students' names. Madam then pointed to 3-4 children and made them stand up one by one, saying, "These are the children."

That was the last period of the day. The period ended. School got over. As usual, I started walking towards the bus stop. Those kids, as usual, started following me, trailing behind.

I was angry. As soon as they came a little closer to me, I turned around and asked:

"Who taught you all this? Who told you to speak to ma'am like that?

Don't you have any respect for teachers?

What do you even think teachers are? Are teachers your slaves or just employees?

Forget teachers — don't you even know how to respect a woman?

What's the point of teaching you about morals and ethics when none of it touches your heart?

Then why do you even come to school? To learn?

Anyway, who is teaching you all this? Certainly not me.

If someone said to a lady in your own house, "How would you feel?"

What would you do at that moment?

Doesn't that ma'am have a brother? Doesn't she have a family?

If she wanted, she could have complained to the principal and got you all suspended the very same day.

She didn't do that. She respected me.

There wasn't even a bit of ill will in her heart towards you — if there had been, she would have got you suspended long ago. Feel ashamed, you all.

Because of staying with you, I'm getting a bad name, too.

I keep you with me so that, by teaching children valuable things, I can help shape them into better human beings.

But you people are rotten from the inside. You people are a waste.

From tomorrow, there's no need for you to come with me."

With that said, I changed my path.

They still followed behind me. And they started repeatedly saying "sorry, sorry, sorry."

I said: "Don't say sorry to me — say it to that madam. And say it from the heart.

If you really feel regret, then only. This fake 'sorry' won't work."

The kids got a little scared/shaken.

In one voice, they said, "Sir, whatever you say, we will do exactly that.

If you tell us, we will even go to Madam's house and say sorry."

I said, "Now you're talking about going to her house again?

No need to go to her house.

You insulted Madam in front of the whole school, so you will apologise in school itself, in front of the entire class.

If possible, bring one cake, write 'sorry' on it, and ask the madam to cut it.

Offer it to madam, feed her, and then apologise."

The kids said, "Okay, sir, we will do exactly that."

The next day was Friday.

It used to be a half-day at that school.

School used to end at 12:30 pm. It was 12:25 pm, and just five minutes remained before the final bell. A boy from my class came rushing in, holding a cake he had brought to apologise to the Hindi madam. He nervously asked me, "Sir, can we say sorry to Madam after school ends?"

I gently but firmly replied, "No. You insulted her in front of everyone, so the apology should be made in front of everyone as well. There are still five minutes left. Call madam here to this very classroom, bring the cake, let her cut it, and then you say sorry right here."

The children agreed enthusiastically. They quickly called Madam, and just as the bell was about to ring, she entered the room. The boys followed with the cake. When Madam saw the word "Sorry" beautifully written on top of the cake, her eyes filled with tears. With glistening eyes and a trembling voice, she said, "I have always considered these children not just my students, but my little brothers. But sometimes, they lose their way."

I smiled and responded, “Ma’am, the fact that they respect you so deeply is clear. Otherwise, who would go to such lengths just to say sorry?”

A soft, warm smile spread across her face. She cut the cake, shared it with the children, and with a gentle tone said, “I forgive all of you from the bottom of my heart. Just remember one thing: never, ever hurt an innocent person’s feelings unnecessarily.” With those touching words, she left the classroom, and I followed soon after.

But after we left, a few children started fighting playfully over the remaining cake. Some smeared cream on each other’s faces, chasing one another in laughter. In the chaos, one boy accidentally bumped into another teacher while running with cream in his hands. This teacher had always been somewhat distant and irritable toward the Hindi madam and me—we never spoke beyond a simple greeting.

Seeing the cake and cream, the teacher immediately questioned, “Where did this cake come from in school?” The children innocently replied, “Sami Sir got it.”

The moment my name was mentioned, it seemed like the teacher found a golden opportunity. Treating it as solid evidence, he dragged the boys to the principal’s office and complained that I had ordered a cake and that the children were playing with it, thereby dirtying the campus.

The principal asked, “Who ordered the cake?” The boys answered, “Sami, Sir.” She then asked, “Why?” They explained truthfully, “Some boys had spoken rudely to Hindi madam, so Sir told them to bring a cake with ‘Sorry’ written on it and apologise to her in front of everyone.”

Hearing this, the principal immediately sent for the Hindi madam and me. When we arrived at the office, we were shocked to see some teachers harshly beating the children while shouting, "Why did you bring a cake? Why are you following Christian culture?" Their anger seemed rooted more in prejudice than in any real concern for discipline.

My heart sank seeing the scene. I turned to the principal and said with calm conviction, "Ma'am, why are you focusing only on the fact that the children brought a cake? Why aren't you seeing the real miracle here—that for the very first time, these children have genuinely apologised to a teacher with such sincerity and effort?"

Those boys who once never respected any woman, who treated her dignity with contempt—today, for the first time in their lives, they truly realised their mistake. With genuine remorse in their hearts, they apologised to a woman. It was a fragile, precious moment of growth, a rare breakthrough.

But if we punish them harshly for this, they will simply revert to who they were before—cold, unapologetic, and closed off. They will never muster the courage to say "sorry" again, not to anyone, ever. That small spark of humanity we saw flickering in them today will be extinguished forever, I kept saying.

Yet the Principal Madam fixated on just one thing: "The cake represents Christian culture, and we cannot promote it in our school." I pleaded with her—please, for once, remove the lens of religion and look with open eyes. What truly matters here is not the cake; it is that these children are learning to apologise, to own their wrongs, to feel empathy. That is infinitely more valuable than any pastry.

The cake? They will encounter and enjoy such things countless times outside these school walls throughout their lives. But learning to say "I'm sorry" from the heart? That is a lesson for a lifetime—one that shapes character, builds relationships, and prevents hearts from hardening.

If we appreciate and encourage their apology even a little today, saying "sorry" will become easier for them whenever they err in the future. They will grow into better men, better human beings. But despite explaining this a thousand times, despite begging for understanding, they kept punishing the boys relentlessly... and in the end, they suspended them.

It breaks my heart to think what message we have sent to those young souls: that their first brave step toward becoming better people was not worth protecting. Instead of nurturing change, we crushed it in the name of rules and rigid beliefs. What kind of future are we building when remorse is punished more severely than disrespect ever was?

In that moment, the true lesson shone through: forgiveness, respect, and a heartfelt apology hold far more power than any mistake or cultural misunderstanding. It was a beautiful reminder that when we guide children with love and patience, even a simple "sorry" written on a cake can heal hearts, mend bonds, and teach the most profound lessons about humanity.

Never underestimate the courage it takes for someone—especially a child—to admit their wrong and make it right. That small act of humility can light up an entire school, and perhaps, even change a life forever.

Cheque of Motivation

A very successful businessman suddenly went bankrupt. His entire factory shut down, and all the workers left one by one. Some of them kept coming back, circling around, demanding their unpaid salaries. But the businessman, who now had nothing left except his own life, had no way to pay anyone.

His wife and children had long since left the house, unable to bear the humiliation and hardship. Seeing his situation spiralling completely out of control, he decided to end his life. With the firm intention of suicide, he stepped out of his empty home one day.

As he walked aimlessly down the road, his mind was flooded with thoughts: How should I do it? Should I jump into a river or the sea? Should I swallow poison? Should I hang myself? Or slit my wrists? He kept walking, unable to decide on any method, lost in the darkness of despair.

Eventually, he reached a small garden along the way. Exhausted, he sat down under a tree. There, beneath the open sky, memories alternated between hope and hopelessness. One moment, he thought of his wife and children and mustered the courage to return home; the next, the sting of public shame and failure pushed him back toward ending it all. He cried silently, then tried to console himself, only to break down again. Alone, confused, and shattered, he had no idea what to do.

In the midst of this inner turmoil, he noticed a well-dressed man approaching. The stranger was wearing a neat coat and trousers, carrying a briefcase, and walking with calm confidence. Without hesitation, he came straight to the businessman and sat down beside him on the grass.

Looking at the troubled man, the stranger spoke gently:

“Forgive me if I’m intruding, but you look deeply distressed. Would you like to share what’s troubling you?”

The businessman, with nothing left to lose, poured out his heart—his sudden bankruptcy, the mountain of debt, the unpaid workers, the abandoned family, the endless humiliation, and finally his plan to end his life.

The well-dressed man listened patiently until the end. Then, with a quiet smile, he said:

“That’s all? Just this much has broken you?”

He continued in a firm, reassuring voice: “Never be afraid of circumstances. Circumstances don’t come to destroy you—they come to make you stronger. Tell me, how much debt do you actually have?”

“Fifty crores,” the businessman replied in a broken voice.

The stranger laughed softly.

“Just fifty crores? And for that small amount, you were ready to give up your life? Listen to me carefully: Hardships do not come to weaken a person; they come to forge unbreakable strength. Every problem in this world already has a solution—you simply haven’t found it yet. There is no lock without a key. If a door exists, the key to open it exists too.”

He leaned closer and spoke with deep conviction:

“Instead of scratching at the problem again and again, start scratching for the solution. The moment you shift your focus from the difficulty to the possibility, answers begin to appear.”

The stranger placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder and said:

“But more important than the money is this truth: You are far bigger than any problem you are facing. Never let a temporary storm convince you that your story is over. Stand up. Face it. Solve it. Because the same man who built an empire once can build another—if he refuses to quit.” Rise again. The key is already in your hand. You just have to turn it.

The businessman, burdened by his troubles, looked at the stranger and said,

"These words can motivate me for a little while, but they can't solve my real problems."

The stranger paused, then spoke with calm compassion: Then, looking straight into the businessman's eyes, he said something that changed everything: “Do one thing. I will give you the fifty crores—right now. Consider your debt cleared.”

The businessman stared at him in disbelief, tears welling up again—this time not of despair, but of overwhelming hope.

Use it however you wish, he continued—no questions asked. But there is just one condition: exactly one year from today, on this same date, at this very spot, we will meet again. And you will return this cheque of 50 crores to me."

The businessman was caught in a whirlwind of emotions. He already carried the heavy weight of a 50-crore loan hanging over his head—why take another 50 crores? Yet a hopeful thought flickered in his mind:

"What if I accept the cheque but never actually use it? With the little money I still have left, I can quietly restart my business with trustworthy people by my side. If things go wrong again, at least the cheque will be there as a safety net. And if everything works out... I'll return it as promised."

Filled with renewed optimism and a spark of determination, he decided to accept the offer. He took the cheque, sealing the agreement with a firm promise: exactly one year later, on this same day, month, and date, they would reunite—and he would hand the cheque back.

This moment marked the turning point. Sometimes, the greatest motivation isn't the money itself—it's the belief that someone sees potential in you, trusts you, and gives you the breathing room to rise again. With that faith in his heart, the businessman walked away ready to rebuild, one courageous step at a time.

In the darkest hour of his life, the businessman gathered his most trusted people. With a heavy heart and tears in his eyes, he poured out his plea: "Give me just six months. I promise—with interest—I will repay every rupee of your salaries in the seventh month. Help me rise again. I will remain forever grateful to each of you."

He wasn't running from his circumstances; he was ready to fight them. And he knew victory would only come through their support.

His loyal team rose to the occasion. In those tough times, they stood united. Day and night, they poured their hearts into restarting production. They remembered every past mistake and vowed not to repeat them. Slowly, steadily, the debts began to shrink.

Whenever fear whispered that another loss was coming, a quiet voice inside him answered: “But the cheque is there, isn’t it?” The mere thought of that blank cheque filled him with courage. It reminded him he wasn’t alone—there was a safety net. Even on nights when doubt crept in—“What if, after six months, I still can’t pay them? What if profits don’t come?”—that same reassuring thought returned: “The cheque is there.” And with it came fresh waves of determination and hope.

In just 8–10 months, he rebuilt his company from the ashes. Two things fueled his comeback: his unbreakable courage and the empowering belief that “if anything goes wrong, the cheque is there.”

Within a year, every debt was cleared. He repaid every salary with interest. Business flourished once more. His wife returned home. Life felt whole again.

Then came the day he had promised to meet that kind stranger—the man who had handed him the cheque of 50 crores exactly one year earlier. Filled with gratitude, he bathed, dressed with care, bought flowers, gifts, and sweets. As he walked to the same garden where their paths had first crossed, his mind overflowed with wonder.

“In today’s world, where even close ones withdraw their hands in crisis, how did a complete stranger become God’s

instrument of help? If he hadn't appeared, where would I be today—ruined, or perhaps no longer here? These days, people are less troubled by their own pain than by others' happiness. Instead of lifting themselves, many prefer to pull down those who rise. Yet in such times, this man came like an angel, inspiring me to stand tall again."

With a heart full of thanks to God, he reached the garden and waited.

Soon, from a distance, he saw the stranger approaching—keeping his word. Smiling warmly, the businessman stood up, gifts and flowers in hand. He waved from a far, and the stranger waved back.

But in an instant, everything changed. An ambulance screeched to a halt. Staff rushed toward the stranger, trying to usher him inside. He resisted—he didn't want to go. They insisted, almost forcing him.

Shocked and worried, the businessman ran over. "What's happening? Why are you taking him? Who is he?"

The attendants replied, "This man escaped from the hospital."

The businessman protested, "There must be a mistake. He's a well-known, wealthy person in this city."

At that, the staff looked surprised and asked, "What? Did he give you a cheque too?"

A jolt ran through him. "How do you know about the cheque?"

They explained gently, “He’s a patient from the mental hospital. His family admitted him there. He keeps escaping, borrowing clothes from anywhere, finding cheque books somehow—and whenever he gets out, he goes around handing out cheques to people, promising help. We’ve been searching for him for a long time.”

The businessman stood frozen. The stranger who had saved him wasn’t a rich man at all. He was someone society had labelled broken. Yet that one act—handing over a worthless piece of paper—had sparked unbreakable confidence.

And that confidence? It had been real. It had rebuilt a business, cleared debts, restored a family, and revived a life.

The true miracle wasn’t the cheque. It was the belief it inspired.

Sometimes, the greatest strength comes not from what the world gives us, but from what we choose to believe about ourselves. A single thought— “I have a safety net”—can turn despair into determination, failure into triumph.

Even if the net was never real... the courage it awakened was.

And that courage? That changes everything.

Rise again. Believe again. Because sometimes, the strongest safety net is the one you carry in your heart.

Just like how a cheque—even if it comes by mistake or unexpectedly—can help lift a person up and get them back on their feet financially,

In the same way, when you see someone broken or struggling in life, instead of making fun of them or judging them, just

show a little courage and offer genuine encouragement, and they can rise again with new strength.

I'm not saying that every teacher must motivate their students, but anyone—whether it's your friend, a relative, your sibling, or just someone you know—can change someone's entire life with just a few words of courage and support.

When someone is in pain, simply place a hand on their head (or shoulder) and say these simple words with sincerity:

"I'm here for you."

"Main hoon na."

Just those few words are often enough—they'll stand up on their own again. And whenever tough times come in the future, they'll think as a smart businessman thinks about his backup plan:

"It's okay... my friend is there for me."

Just the way they used to think earlier: "Cheque toh hai na." (I've got that cheque as my safety net.)

So never underestimate the power of a small act of kindness and a few heartfelt words—they can become someone's strongest support system and turn their life around for the better. Keep spreading that strength and hope!

Raghav Sir

Back in my school days, our hostel housemaster was Mr Raghav Sir – a man so strict that even the bravest kids would start sweating just hearing his footsteps. Everyone was terrified of him.

Since I was in his house, I got a front-row seat to his daily routine. Every evening from 4 to 6 pm, a doctor from the nearby city would come to the school dispensary to check the students. All the sick boys from all the houses had to line up with Raghav Sir like a disciplined army platoon – stand in queue, get examined, collect medicine, and march back.

One regular evening, we were all standing there in the dispensary line as usual. The doctor was busy checking the kids from other houses. Suddenly, a boy from a different house walks up, spots Raghav Sir, and immediately goes:

“Good evening, Sir!”

Sir looks at him and asks in his trademark serious tone:

“What’s wrong with you?”

The boy replies innocently:

“Sir, mujhe subh se chakkar aa raha hai.”

Sir immediately translates it into English for some reason:

“Achha... so you are getting giddiness.”

(Important side note: the boy had no idea that “giddiness” = “chakkar”. Zero clue.)

As soon as Sir says, “You are getting giddy,” the boy panics a little and quickly corrects him:

“Nahi Sir... only chakkar!”

Sir raises one eyebrow and asks again (now sounding slightly annoyed):

“Apart from giddiness, anything else you are getting?”

Boy, still completely serious and trying to be accurate:

“No, Sir... sirf chakkar aa raha hai.”

That was the final straw.

Raghav Sir’s face turns red. In one swift motion – THWACK! – he lands a solid, classic “ek kaan ke neeche thappad” and roars:

“Arey buddhu! Giddiness aur chakkar dono ek hi cheez hain! To tumko sirf chakkar aa raha hai!?”

The boy, now completely rattled, eyes wide, cheek stinging, somehow manages to reply with 100% sincerity:

“Nahi Sir... only giddiness!”

The entire dispensary exploded.

Raghav Sir burst out laughing so hard he had to hold the table. All the other boys (including the ones who were actually sick) started laughing like crazy. Even the doctor couldn’t keep a straight face and turned away pretending to write something. The poor, confused boy just stood there blushing, still holding

his stinging cheek, not understanding why everyone was dying of laughter.

Classic Raghav Sir moment. Strict... scary... but unintentionally hilarious.

Good Deeds

One day, in a scorching desert country, three close friends set out on a business trip to another city. The blazing sun soon became unbearable, so they decided to stop for a short rest in a nearby cave to escape the heat.

As soon as they sat down in the cool shade of the cave, exhaustion took over, and all three drifted off into a deep sleep.

When they finally woke up, horror struck—they discovered a massive boulder had somehow rolled down and completely blocked the cave's entrance. The huge rock sealed the opening like a giant cork, making it impossible for them to get out.

The three friends panicked. They huddled together, discussing what to do, their voices echoing in the dim cave.

They tried everything they could think of: pushing with all their combined strength, shoving from different angles, even using their shoulders and backs like human battering rams. But the boulder didn't budge an inch—it was as solid and stubborn as a mountain.

Sweaty, tired, and trapped, the friends stared at the immovable rock in disbelief, realising they were now in serious trouble.

Without losing hope, one of the friends spoke up with quiet determination:

"Wait, guys... there's only one way left now. Let's all turn to the Almighty and pray. While we pray, each of us will mention at least one good deed we've done purely for the sake of God. If that act of kindness was truly sincere and done only for Him, then God will accept our prayer. In exchange for that good deed, He will remove this trouble from us today—and this boulder will move."

Because the cave was cramped and there wasn't enough space for all three to sit together comfortably and pray at once, they decided to take turns. One by one, each friend would pray earnestly, pleading with God and invoking the memory of one truly sincere good deed they had performed, asking Him to lift this calamity and free them from the trap.

The air inside the cave grew heavy with hope, faith, and quiet reflection as they prepared to begin their individual supplications.

The first friend sat down quietly on the cool cave floor, closing his eyes. He began searching through the memories of his life, trying to recall at least one truly sincere good deed he had done—something he could humbly offer to the Almighty as a plea to remove this boulder and save them all.

After a moment of deep reflection, one act came clearly to his heart. With folded hands and a trembling voice, he began to speak to God in the silence of his soul, his words soft but filled with raw emotion:

"O Almighty... You know everything. Nothing is hidden from You.

As you already know, at home I have two small children, my wife, and my old, frail mother, who has been bedridden for years, always unwell, always dependent.

Every single day, no matter how tired I am from work, it has been my habit—my unwritten rule—that when I return home, and my wife prepares the fresh rotis, the very first roti is always for my mother.

Only after her stomach is full do the rest of us sit down to eat. You are my witness to this.

But there was one night...

I came back exhausted from work. My wife had made the rotis as usual. I took the plate of hot food and a glass of water and went straight to Mother's room.

When I reached there, I saw she had already fallen asleep—deep, peaceful sleep after a long day of pain.

I couldn't bear to wake her. She needed that rest more than anything.

So, I stood there quietly... one hand holding the glass of water, the other holding the thali of roti and sabzi... just standing in the doorway, waiting.

I stood like that the entire night—through the dark hours, through the silence, through the cold—until the first light of morning crept in.

Only when my mother finally opened her eyes at dawn did I gently wake her with love, feed her the first roti with my own hands, make sure she ate to her heart's content... and only then did the rest of us eat.

My wife and children had remained hungry all night, waiting patiently because no one would eat until Mother had been fed.

O Lord... if this one small act—if this night of standing hungry and sleepless just so my mother could rest—was done purely for Your pleasure, with no desire for show or praise...

Then, in exchange for that one act of love, please remove this calamity from us today. Lift this stone. Free us.”

The prayer had barely left his lips when—miraculously—the massive boulder shifted.

Just a little... but enough.

A narrow sliver of light slipped through the gap; a whisper of fresh air entered the cave.

The other two friends stared in stunned silence, their eyes wide with awe and tears.

They looked at their friend, then at the stone, then back at him—speechless, hearts overflowing with wonder at what simple, selfless love could move when all human strength had failed.

The cave, once filled with despair, now held the quiet power of faith and a mother’s unseen blessing.

Now it was the second friend's turn.

He sat down quietly in the dim light of the cave, his heart heavy yet hopeful. He closed his eyes and searched deeply through the memories of his life, reflecting for a long time until one particular act of kindness rose clearly to the surface—one he had kept hidden in his heart all these years.

With a voice thick with emotion, he began to plead softly to the Almighty, his words trembling with sincerity:

“O Almighty... You know everything hidden in every heart. Nothing escapes Your sight.

As you are aware, I have many workers who labour hard under the sun all day long. Every evening, they receive their rightful wages and return home to their families with peace in their hearts.

But one day, one of those workers—due to some sudden emergency—left without collecting his daily wage. I carefully set his money aside, thinking he would return soon and I would hand it to him personally.

Days turned into weeks, weeks into months, and still he did not come back. Rather than keep the money idle or spend it, my conscience would not allow it. So, with that small amount, I bought a single goat.

A year passed... and that one goat gave birth to four kids.

The next year, those goats grew and gave birth to four more each.

Year after year, the herd multiplied quietly, honestly, untouched by greed.

Ten full years went by. From that single unpaid day's wage, the herd had grown to one hundred strong goats.

Then, after all that time, the same worker finally returned. He came humbly, reminding me of that forgotten day—he had done one full day's labour and left without his pay. Now he had come only to claim what was rightfully his.

I could have simply given him back the original small amount and been done with it. No one would have known. But my faith, my fear of You, would not let me betray the trust of that honest labour.

So I led him to the pen where the goats grazed peacefully. I looked him in the eyes and said,

'These one hundred goats... they are all yours. They are born from your one day's wage. Take them—they belong to you.'

His eyes filled with tears of disbelief and overwhelming joy. He embraced me, thanked me from the depths of his soul, and walked away with his rightful fortune, his life forever changed.

O Lord... if this act—if this refusal to take even a single rupee that was not mine, if this multiplication of justice and return of what was owed—was done purely out of fear and love for You alone, with no desire for praise or reward from anyone else...

Then, in exchange for that one act of integrity, please lift this hardship from us today. Remove this stone. Grant us freedom."

As the last words of his prayer faded into the silence of the cave, the massive boulder trembled once more.

It shifted further—this time noticeably—widening the gap, letting in more light, more air, more hope.

The first friend and the third stared in tearful astonishment, their hearts pounding with wonder. They looked at their companion, seeing not just a man, but living proof that true

honesty and selflessness, when offered to God, can move mountains—or in this case, a mountain of stone.

The cave, once a tomb of despair, now breathed with the quiet miracle of faith rewarded.

Now it was the third friend's turn.

He sat down slowly, the weight of the moment pressing on his chest. The cave felt smaller, the air thicker, but his resolve burned brighter than ever. He closed his eyes, searched the deepest corners of his soul, and finally found the memory he had buried long ago—not out of shame, but out of quiet reverence. With a voice low, raw, and trembling with emotion, he began to speak to the Almighty, pouring out his heart:

“O Lord... You know every secret, every hidden thought, every moment I’ve tried to forget. You see what no one else can see.

There was once a distant cousin of mine... a girl I loved deeply, silently, hopelessly. But she did not feel the same for me. One day, driven by some desperate need, she had no choice but to come to me for money. In that moment of her vulnerability, a dark temptation rose inside me. I told her I would give her the money—but only if she met me alone, in private, at night.

She was cornered, helpless. She agreed.

That night arrived. The silence of the darkness, the loneliness of the room, the absence of any witness... everything was perfect for me to do whatever I wanted. I could have crossed every line. No one would have known. No one would have judged.

But suddenly, in the stillness of that moment, a single thought pierced my heart like lightning:

‘There may be no one here to see... but God is watching.’

That one sentence changed everything. It flooded me with fear—not fear of people, but fear of disappointing the One who never sleeps, never looks away. In that instant, I stepped back. I did not touch her. I simply handed her the money—every rupee she needed—and sent her home safely. I never asked for it back. I never reminded her. I never spoke of that night again.

O Almighty... if on that lonely night, purely out of awe and love for You, I held back from harming her honour... if that restraint was a true act of righteousness done only for Your pleasure... then, by the barakah (blessing) of that one moment of self-control, please remove this calamity today. Lift this stone. Free us. And do not let me be humiliated in front of my friends who have already seen Your mercy twice.”

He had barely finished the words when the boulder groaned—a deep, earth-shaking sound.

Then... it moved.

Not a little. Not halfway.

Completely.

The massive stone rolled aside with effortless power, as if an invisible hand had gently pushed it away. Golden sunlight poured into the cave like liquid hope. Fresh air rushed in, carrying the scent of freedom.

The three friends stared in stunned silence for a heartbeat—then tears spilt from their eyes. They embraced each other fiercely, laughing and crying at once, overwhelmed by the sheer miracle of it all.

One by one, they stepped out into the open desert, the scorching sun now feeling like a warm embrace instead of punishment. They looked back at the cave that had almost become their tomb... and then ahead to the path.

No words were needed. Each of them carried the same quiet certainty deep in their hearts:

When a person chooses righteousness—even in the darkest, most private moment—they choose God over desire, integrity over opportunity, restraint over temptation.

...God does not forget.

And sometimes, in the most impossible situations, He moves mountains—or boulders—just to honour a single, sincere act of goodness.

They walked on toward their destination, stronger, humbler, forever changed—living proof that true character, offered to the Almighty in secret, can become the greatest force for deliverance in the light of day.

Keep faith. Keep doing good—even when no one is watching.
Because Someone always is.

Concentration and Perfection

Concentration and perfection are intimately linked: true perfection rarely emerges from scattered effort or obsessive polishing of every detail. Instead, it arises from sustained, undistracted focus on the few things that truly matter in any given moment. Deep concentration quiets the inner noise of doubt and distraction, allowing skill, intuition, and judgment to align in their purest form. The pursuit of perfection, therefore, is less about flawless execution and more about the disciplined art of giving undivided attention—where presence itself becomes the highest form of precision.

If a student listens to every class with full concentration, about 50% of their studies are already completed in the classroom. Today's generation faces countless distractions, making it quite challenging to stay focused in such an environment. However, with self-discipline and a strong determination to achieve something in life, concentration becomes no big deal for them.

These days, it has become the teacher's responsibility to make their classes so engaging and enjoyable that concentration happens naturally. When a teacher teaches from the heart, it truly reaches the students' hearts.

In my career, I've seen some teachers who deliberately teach in class in a way students can't understand, intentionally fail them, and then, during PTM (Parent-Teacher Meetings), tell parents to send the child to their place for tuition on separate

fees. They teach well only in tuition. Others don't even teach properly in tuition; they just go through the motions and tell kids, "Ask if you have any doubts." But how can a child whose basics aren't clear even know what doubts to ask?

Parents think that since the child is attending tuition, results will improve—but no one really knows what's happening in those sessions. Parents believe they've paid school fees, so it's now the teachers' responsibility to educate their child properly. Meanwhile, teachers think parents gave birth to and raised the child, so the greater responsibility lies with them to shape the child correctly.

In reality, this responsibility belongs to both teachers and parents alike.

If every teacher thinks, "I will make my students perfect in my subject. I will teach with great attention to detail, clear every doubt thoroughly, strengthen their basics, and explain every concept clearly—without any shortcuts or complaints," then just imagine what kind of students would emerge.

I remember I was never brilliant in mathematics. Perhaps because my parents admitted me to school (a residential one) at just 4 years of age. I was always homesick, constantly missing my parents. I had no idea what school, studies, or subjects even meant or why they existed. I never had a teacher who would sit me down and genuinely ask, "What's your problem?"

I still recall when I was in 10th grade: my mathematics teacher asked me a question in class. When I couldn't answer, he insulted me in front of everyone. He said, "Forget studies—go work with your dad. He's a mechanical engineer anyway, so

sit under his supervision and learn to hold things with your hands.” After that, I always tried to skip maths periods.

Even today, as a teacher myself, I see some children in school bunking the periods of those teachers or subjects they dislike. They hide in the bathroom. When I asked many such students why they do it, they said, “Sir, we don’t understand anything, so we bunk.” I told them, “This won’t solve your problem. You’ve paid fees—asking doubts is your right, and clearing them is the teacher’s duty. You don’t even know your own rights.”

They replied, “Sir, we don’t understand, and on top of that, the teacher insults us in class. It hurts our self-respect.” I said, “To have your self-respect hurt, first you need to build self-respect.”

I want to request all teachers: please make a sincere effort to improve every single child. Children are children—don’t hold grudges against them. Motivate them in the middle of class, listen to their problems. Whenever students tell me these things, my own past comes rushing back—exactly the same happened to me. Neither my parents nor my teachers truly understood. No one actually guided me.

When I was in class 7 or 8, one of my primary school teachers—who had taught me in classes 2 and 3 and whose subject was mathematics—called me during games period. She liked me because of my singing talent. She asked why my maths results were always so low. I told her honestly, “Ma’am, I don’t understand.” Right there on the ground, she gave me an addition problem—I solved it easily. Then she gave me a subtraction problem—I couldn’t do it.

I could do subtraction easily when the top digit was larger than the bottom one, but when it was the other way around (borrowing needed), I got completely stuck. That's when she understood where I was blocked. Using a stick on the ground, she drew numbers and explained: "If the top digit is smaller and the bottom is larger, you borrow 1 from the side digit and make it 10 plus the top digit..." For the first time, I truly understood how subtraction with borrowing works. A concept that should have been clear in class 2 or 3 finally became clear to me in class 8—only because of that one caring teacher.

If every child, in every school and in every subject, had teachers like her, no student would ever lag behind in any subject.

I still vividly remember one incident from my time as a teacher. A mother approached me with deep concern: "Sir, my daughter is terrified of Social Studies—your subject. Every time there's a test or exam, she makes excuses and tries to bunk school. She always ends up failing."

The girl was in Class 6 at the time.

I calmly told the mother, "Ma'am, whether she passes or fails is something we'll see later. Right now, the most important thing is to remove the fear of the subject—and of the subject teacher—from her heart. As long as fear remains, she will never truly face the subject. And there is only one cure for fear: facing it head-on. Fear disappears the moment you confront it."

I shared with her the two powerful full forms of **FEAR**:

- **Forget Everything and Run**

- Face Everything and Rise

I assured her, “Leave it to me. I will handle her. If I ever need your help, I’ll reach out.”

When that girl came to Class 7, I began in a very different way. Instead of jumping straight into questions about the subject, I started with simple, warm conversations—asking about her breakfast, her family, the little things in her day. During lunch breaks, I would sit with her. Slowly, very slowly, she began to open up. I never once pressured her with subject-related questions.

As she felt safe and comfortable around me, she began sharing bits of her life on her own. The day she realised, “Sir is actually kind... I was scared for no reason,” something beautiful happened—her mind became receptive. She started absorbing whatever I taught.

Yes, she still failed in Class 7. But I never scolded her, never showed anger. I simply believed that if her heart opened to the teacher, her mind would eventually open to the subject.

And today, she is in Class 9. On her own strength, through her own hard work, she passes—sometimes by a narrow margin, but always on her own merit. What touches my heart the most is this: her confidence has grown so much that she now patiently explains Social Studies concepts to weaker students in her own class.

That’s the real victory—not just marks on a report card, but a child who once ran away from fear now helping others rise above it.

Never underestimate the power of patience, kindness, and genuine belief in a child. When fear is replaced with trust, miracles happen—one small, consistent step at a time.

One crisp morning in the first-year MBBS class, the lecturer gathered his eager students and announced, "Today, we're diving into practicals. We'll start with dissecting a dog, because you're all fresh to this world of medicine, and the sight of a human body might just send you tumbling into a faint. We'll build your resilience step by step: animals first, until you're ready to master human surgeries with steady hands."

The students buzzed with excitement, filing into the practical room like explorers on a grand adventure. The lecturer unveiled a preserved dog on the dissection table, and instantly, the air thickened with a pungent odour that clawed at their senses. Masks flew up to noses as the class braced themselves.

"Before we begin," the lecturer said with a knowing smile, "there are a few unbreakable rules you must follow." The students leaned in, curiosity piqued. "Tell us, sir—what do we do?"

Without a word, he raised his ring finger and slipped it deliberately into the dog's nostril. "You all must do the same."

A wave of disbelief rippled through the room. "Sir, what kind of rule is this? You're pulling our leg!" they protested, laughter mingling with unease.

"If I were joking," he replied firmly, "would I stick my finger in there myself? Now, enough chatter—do it, or the dissection doesn't start."

Reluctantly, one by one, they closed their eyes, gritted their teeth, and gingerly inserted their ring fingers into the cold, unyielding nostril. Irritation bubbled up as the queasy sensation hit. "Sir, what's next? Hurry—we're about to heave!"

"First, open your eyes," he instructed calmly. As they did, he placed his middle finger into his own mouth and nodded expectantly. "Now you."

Shock froze the class. Murmurs of outrage erupted, but his resolve was ironclad: "Until you follow through, this session ends here. I did it—so must you, if you want to learn."

Swallowing their pride (and more), they complied, sliding the same finger into their mouths. The room fell silent, faces a mosaic of disgust and dawning horror.

Then, with grave authority, the lecturer withdrew his hand and declared, "Observe: I inserted my ring finger into the dog's nose... but my middle finger into my mouth. Yet not one of you noticed the switch. I was testing your concentration—the lifeblood of our profession. In the heat of an operation, imagine slipping: you mean to mend the heart but probe the lung instead. A doctor's wandering focus isn't just a mistake; it's a stain on the sacred oath we take. It could shutter your clinic, shatter lives, and dim the light of healing you carry.

"But here's the spark of inspiration: Today, you've glimpsed your potential—and your pitfalls. Forge that razor-sharp focus now, in every lesson, every breath. For in medicine, as in life, true mastery isn't in the scalpel's edge, but in the unyielding

gaze of your mind. Rise to it, future healers. The world needs your unwavering light."

The child who studies with full concentration or sits attentively in class becomes a master or an expert in their field.

There are millions of engineers in this world, yet we specifically remember Sir M. Visvesvaraya and celebrate his birthday every year as Engineers' Day—not just in India, but also in countries like Sri Lanka and Tanzania (and some others observe Engineers' Day around the same time in September, though tied to their own traditions or figures).

In today's world, unless you become a true expert in your field, you have little value or recognition. You must master your subject—and that mastery comes only through deep concentration and focus.

As we heard in the movie 3 Idiots: "First become capable, then success will automatically follow you. Don't chase success—become an expert."

The key message is clear: Pursue excellence and true expertise through focused effort, and success will come naturally.

In Allama Iqbal's masterpiece Jawab-e-Shikwa, God speaks directly to humanity with profound wisdom:

"Koi qabil to ho, hum unhe shaan-e-kai dete hain;
Dhundne walon ko to hum duniya bhi nayi dete hain."
"Justaju ho to safar khatm kahan hota hai?
Yun to har mod pe manzil ka guman hota hai."

Through these powerful verses, God conveys a timeless truth: Become worthy first, and I will grant you glory and honour—yes, even a new world to those who earnestly seek. If you

possess true striving and pursuit, the journey never truly ends; at every turn, a new destination appears on the horizon.

God is telling us: I am ready to bless you with the life of dignity, success, and splendour you desire—or something far greater still—but first, cultivate the capability within yourself. Aspire to become a doctor? Then develop the knowledge, discipline, skill, compassion, and character that define a true doctor. Don't merely wish for the title while lacking the substance—appearance, behaviour, and inner qualities must align with the role you claim. Expecting the reward without earning the right to receive it will never work.

Positive thinking alone is powerful, but it must be matched with positive action to produce positive results. Dreaming of a bountiful harvest while the farmer sleeps in the field? The crops won't grow on wishes alone. Intention without effort remains empty.

Today's youth often dream big—becoming doctors, engineers, leaders—but their actions sometimes reflect the opposite: carelessness, indiscipline, or negativity. Remember the simple mathematical truth: Positive mindset + negative actions = negative outcome. It's an unbreakable formula.

Rise up! Combine inspiring thoughts with relentless, positive effort. Become the person worthy of your dreams. When you do, the doors of honour, achievement, and even a renewed world will open before you—just as Allama Iqbal's divine voice reminds us.

Strive sincerely, act consistently, and watch greatness unfold. You are capable—now prove it to yourself and to the One who waits to elevate you!

Since the story of Sir M. Visvesvaraya came up, let me share an example that one of my teachers used to illustrate his extraordinary expertise and powers of observation.

The teacher recounted that one day, Sir M. Visvesvaraya was travelling by train. After some time, he suddenly stood up from his seat and pulled the emergency chain. The train came to a halt. The Ticket Examiner (TT) arrived and asked who had pulled the chain. Visvesvaraya calmly replied, "I did."

The TT asked, "Why did you pull it?"

He explained, "The track ahead is broken."

The TT was shocked and asked, "How do you know it's broken?"

Visvesvaraya replied, "Whenever I travel by train, I listen very attentively to the sound of the train moving on the tracks. Suddenly, there was a change in that sound—a variation that only occurs when the track is either loose or broken. Please inspect it immediately. If it is truly broken, we have saved everyone's lives. And if it's not, feel free to impose whatever fine you want for wasting time—I'm no ordinary person; I am also the Dewan (Prime Minister) of the Mysore Maharaja."

When the railway staff went to check, they discovered that the track was indeed broken (or had a serious crack/fishplate issue, as per various accounts). Thanks to his sharp focus and deep engineering knowledge, a major accident was averted, potentially saving many lives.

Today, go ahead and seat any engineer in the world—whether a top railway engineer, a college lecturer in engineering, or

even the Vice Chancellor of an engineering university—inside a moving train. Ask them to listen carefully to the sound of the wheels on the tracks and tell you whether the rail track is broken or intact.

I'm absolutely certain: not a single one can do it accurately.

And I'm convinced that no such engineer has ever existed in the past, nor will one ever emerge in the future, who can truly detect a broken rail just by the sound alone.

This is what real perfection looks like.

True mastery, true excellence, is so rare and so complete that even the most highly qualified experts fall short when measured against it. It reminds us that no matter how much knowledge we acquire, how many degrees we collect, or how advanced our technology becomes, there are still heights of skill, intuition, and precision that remain almost superhuman.

Strive for that level. Don't settle for "good enough." Chase the kind of perfection that leaves even the experts speechless. Because when you reach it, the world will recognise something truly extraordinary in you.

Keep pushing. True greatness isn't in the title—it's in the unmatched mastery!

This anecdote beautifully highlights how true mastery and unwavering concentration can make someone exceptional—even in everyday situations. It turns ordinary observation into life-saving expertise.

(It's a popular inspirational story often shared in India, especially around Engineers' Day, though some details vary

slightly across retellings—like whether it was a crack, loose fishplate, or sabotage—but the core message remains the same: expertise comes from deep, focused attention.)

Dr. Kulkarni

Whenever the conversation turns to doctors, my mind always drifts back to one very special person—Dr. Kulkarni, a dermatologist. From my childhood, my parents and I have been visiting him. Today, he has grown old and now sees patients only three days a week, yet in my eyes, he remains the perfect example of an expert doctor. I still mention him to my students as the ideal they should aspire to be—calm, quiet, deeply knowledgeable, and remarkably down-to-earth.

My first encounter with him happened when I was just eight years old, and my sister was ten. My sister has always been absolutely crazy about cats—she still is. Even now, her home is filled with them. Back then, she spent her entire day playing with, eating with, sleeping beside, and even bathing them regularly.

One day, out of nowhere, she fell seriously ill. She stopped eating completely, and soon her stomach began to bloat and swell dramatically. My mother was frantic with worry. Someone suggested, “A new doctor has come to town—Dr. Kulkarni. You should take her to him.”

So, my mom and I rushed to his clinic with my sister. By then, she was so weak that the doctor had her lie down on a stretcher; she was still half-asleep, almost unconscious.

Dr Kulkarni examined her gently. He placed his hands on her swollen abdomen and pressed carefully. Then, with complete composure, he asked my mother the very first question:

“Does your home have cats?”

My mother and I were both stunned. How could he possibly know just by touching her stomach?

My mom replied, “Yes, we do.”

He asked further, “Does this girl play a lot with them?”

“Yes,” my mom said, “all the time.”

I stood there, shocked, wave after wave hitting me. Then Dr Kulkarni explained in the calmest voice:

“She has been playing so much with cats that some cat hair has gone into her stomach. That hair has caused an infection and led to this bloating. There’s no need to worry—this is treatable. I’ll give her some medicines.”

He prescribed the tablets, and amazingly, after just one dose, my sister sat up on her own. Within minutes, she—who hadn’t eaten for two full days—was suddenly asking for food with real hunger.

That day, as an eight-year-old boy, I stood in complete awe of this doctor’s profound knowledge and quiet confidence. It wasn’t just his medical expertise that left a mark on me—it was his ability to see what no one else could, to connect the smallest clues to the truth, and to bring healing with such calm assurance.

Even today, decades later, Dr Kulkarni remains my gold standard for what a true doctor should be: wise, observant,

humble, and deeply compassionate. He taught me—without ever saying a word—that real mastery in any field comes not just from books, but from truly seeing and caring for the people in front of you.

One day, my mother took me along to the fields to check on the ploughing and the crops. She walked through the rows with purpose, pulling out unwanted weeds by hand, inspecting every plant closely, and giving clear instructions to the farmers working there. We spent the afternoon tending to the land, and by evening, we headed back home.

As soon as we reached the house, she freshened up, changed her clothes, and then began scratching her feet intensely. The itching was unbearable—she scratched so fiercely that it was painful to watch. I applied creams, but nothing brought relief. In desperation, she started using a comb to scratch, and soon her feet began to bleed from the relentless rubbing. The discomfort was excruciating.

Seeing her in such agony, I suggested, “Let’s go to Dr Kulkarni—he’ll know exactly what to do.” We went straight to his clinic. This time, I was especially eager to observe him again, to witness that same quiet brilliance.

Dr Kulkarni examined my mother’s feet carefully. Then, in his calm, composed voice, he asked his very first question:

“Did you go to the fields recently, walking among the plants?”

My mother and I were stunned once more. We exchanged a quick glance—how could he possibly know just by looking at her feet? There was no visible dirt, no obvious sign of the field.

“Yes,” she replied, “just two days ago.”

He nodded gently and explained, “Walking through the foliage and grass has caused an allergic reaction on your skin—contact dermatitis from the plants. There’s nothing to worry about. I’ll give you a thick ointment; apply it, and it will settle down quickly.”

He prescribed the medicine, and amazingly, after just one application, the intense itching vanished. The redness faded, the irritation disappeared, and my mother was back to her normal self in no time.

Moments like these are why Dr Kulkarni remains the gold standard of expertise in my eyes, even today. His ability to read the subtlest clues—connecting everyday life to medical truth with such precision and calm—never ceases to inspire me.

He reminds us that true mastery isn’t loud or showy. It comes from deep observation, genuine care, and years of quiet dedication. In a world full of noise, people like him teach us that real healing—whether of the body, mind, or spirit—begins with truly seeing the person in front of you.

"To become an expert, you need perfection.

And for perfection, you need concentration.

But before all of these, you must have curiosity, a hobby, passion, and genuine interest.

Only then — even if you’re alone — will you do all those things that a loser won’t do even after being given everything."

Slightly more polished/flowing version (keeping the original emotion intact):

"To become an expert, you first need perfection.

Perfection demands deep concentration.

But even before that, you need curiosity, passion, real interest, a spark inside you.

Only then will you, even when completely alone, do the kind of work that a loser still won't do even after being handed everything on a plate."

Beautifully said, by the way.

The core message is very powerful: Passion & inner drive > everything else.

The most famous and motivational story behind the invention of the steam engine is that of James Watt. It's a perfect example of curiosity, patience, and years of relentless hard work. Let me tell it in a fun and exciting way:

Once upon a time, in Scotland in the 1730s-40s, there was a boy named James Watt. From childhood, he was incredibly curious. People say that one day he was sitting in his mother's (or aunt's) house. A tea kettle was on the fire, water boiling away. The lid of the kettle was lifting and falling because of steam pressure – rising, then falling back.

James Watt sat there for hours, just staring at that lid. He started wondering: "Why does this steam have so much power? Can this force be used for something big?" That small moment planted a huge question in his mind – Can we control the power of steam and build a machine that changes the world?

Now the real story begins. Around the 1760s, an old steam engine called the Newcomen engine was used to pump water out of coal mines. But it was super slow, burned tons of coal, and only used 1-2% of the steam's actual power.

At Glasgow University, a small model of this engine broke down. They sent it to James Watt for repair (he was working as an instrument maker at the time). Watt fixed it, but he realised how terribly inefficient it was – it did very little work and wasted so much fuel.

That's where the real battle started:

- Watt asked himself: What's the main problem? He figured out that cooling the steam in the same cylinder wasted massive amounts of energy (the cylinder had to heat up and cool down repeatedly).
- For years, he experimented. Day and night thinking, building models, failing again and again.
- Many times, he almost gave up. Money ran out, and people laughed at him, saying, "What is this crazy guy doing?"
- But Watt never quit. He invented the separate condenser – moving the steam-cooling part outside the main cylinder. This made the engine 4-5 times more efficient!

By 1776, his engine was ready. It was so brilliant that it sparked the Industrial Revolution. Factories ran faster, trains were born, ships powered ahead – the whole world changed forever.

What's the motivational lesson here?

- A tiny spark of curiosity (like watching a kettle lid) can kickstart a world-changing discovery.
- Real success doesn't come overnight – it took Watt 10-15 years of grinding.
- People will mock you, failures will hit hard, money and time will feel short – but if you truly believe it can be done, don't stop.
- James Watt proved that one person's stubborn determination and hard work can transform an entire civilisation.

So next time a goal feels impossible, or people say "It can't be done" – just remember that boy staring at the kettle, who listened to the steam and gave the world unstoppable speed.

Around the early 1800s, most people believed powering a boat with steam was impossible. Several inventors had tried – like John Fitch and Oliver Evans – but their efforts ended in failure: boats sank, engines exploded, speeds were pitifully slow, and fortunes were lost. Sceptics laughed and called it pure madness.

Robert Fulton was an American artist-turned-engineer and inventor. He started as a painter, then travelled to Europe, where he even designed a submarine for Napoleon, which didn't succeed. In 1803, while in France, he tested an early steamboat on the Seine River. It performed briefly but proved too fragile: during a storm, the heavy engine broke through the hull, and the boat sank. More ridicule followed.

Undeterred, Fulton returned to America in 1806 and partnered with Robert R. Livingston, a prominent statesman who held a 20-year monopoly on steam navigation on New York's Hudson River – but only if the boat could maintain at least 4 miles per hour. Together, they combined Fulton's vision with Livingston's resources. Fulton imported a top-quality steam engine from James Watt's firm in England and built a vessel officially named the North River Steamboat (later popularly called the Clermont, after Livingston's estate).

The boat was impressive for its time: about 142–150 feet long, narrow, with two large side paddle wheels (every 15 feet in diameter), powered by a reliable 24-horsepower engine. It had a shallow draft of just 2 feet, perfect for river navigation.

On August 17, 1807, the big day arrived – the maiden voyage from New York City to Albany, roughly 150 miles up the Hudson. Crowds gathered at the wharf, mocking it as "Fulton's Folly." People jeered: "It'll never move!" or "This crazy thing won't go a mile!" Fulton and his guests boarded, fired up the engine, and at first, it sputtered and stopped due to a minor issue. Laughter echoed louder.

But Fulton quickly fixed it, and the boat surged forward under pure steam power. It chugged steadily against the current and wind, overtaking sailing ships as if they were standing still. The journey took 32 hours to reach Albany – a trip that normally required 4 days by sailboat. The return trip was even faster, taking around 30 hours and averaging about 5 miles per hour.

The mockery turned to awe. The Clermont proved reliable and profitable: it began carrying paying passengers regularly,

generating real income. It was the world's first commercially successful steamboat, transforming river travel, boosting trade, opening up America's interior, and fuelling the Industrial Revolution by making rivers into reliable highways.

The motivational lessons here are powerful:

- Don't fear failure — Fulton's 1803 boat literally sank, but he learned, redesigned, and came back stronger.
- People will mock your dreams, calling them "Fulton's Folly" — ignore the noise if you have real belief and a solid plan.
- Success rarely comes alone: great partnerships (like Fulton and Livingston), smart technology (Watt's engine), and persistent effort combine to win.
- One determined step — that 32-hour voyage — can reshape rivers, economies, cities, and entire eras.

I've often noticed one thing in life: a person struggles alone. When you're fighting your battles, grinding through the hard days, hardly anyone steps up to help or stand by your side.

But the moment you start succeeding, achieve something big, or rise in life, suddenly, everyone wants to be around you, building connections, acting as they've always believed in you.

Take the famous story of Robert Fulton's steamboat (often mocked as "Fulton's Folly"). When his strange-looking boat wasn't moving smoothly at first — sputtering and stalling — crowds gathered just to laugh, ridicule him, and declare it would never work. People said it was impossible, a complete waste.

Yet when it finally powered up, sailed steadily against the wind and tide, and proved itself successful... instead of clapping or motivating him, those same people shifted their tune. Now they said, "Just watch — this boat won't stop now!" The mockery turned into predictions of endless success, but the genuine support? Still missing.

The truth is, most people are quick to spot your mistakes, highlight your flaws, and point out why you'll fail. They'll search for every reason to pull you down. But whether those words break you or fuel you—that choice is yours.

You can let their criticism sink deep into your heart and stop you in your tracks...

OR

You can treat every doubt, every laugh, every "you can't" as a challenge — proof that you're on the right path, because truly big things always look impossible at first.

Keep going. Rise anyway. Let their words become the fire that pushes you forward, not the weight that holds you back. The world may not cheer for your struggle, but it will have no choice but to respect your success.

**"Relationships aren't defined by blood —
they're defined by emotions."**

No matter what relationship it is in this world—whether it's between siblings, parents and children, friends, or even teacher and student—until there is a deep feeling inside that "this person is truly mine," we rarely do anything meaningful for them from the heart.

These days, we see so many children sending their parents to old-age homes. Despite the bond of blood, they don't want to keep their own mother and father close. We've witnessed countless brothers telling their sisters after marriage, "Now you're someone else's; don't come back to this house." And far too many cases where siblings fight bitterly over property, tearing apart what was once shared blood and childhood memories.

The harsh truth is this: A relationship remains just a label, a name, until the emotion—the real sense of belonging, care, and ownership—awakens in the heart. Without that inner feeling of "mine," no bond truly becomes a relationship worth cherishing.

That feeling can be nurtured. It can be rebuilt. It can be chosen every single day.

Choose to feel it. Choose to act on it. Choose to say with your actions: "You are mine, and I am yours—not just by relation, but by heart."

Because when the emotion arrives, even the weakest thread turns into an unbreakable bond.

And when it is absent, even the strongest blood tie can fade away.

Let's not wait for relationships to break before we realise their value.

Let's fill them with emotions/feelings today—so that tomorrow no one has to ask, "Why did this happen despite being family?"

Cherish the people who are yours. Feel it deeply. Act on it fiercely.

That's what turns a mere "Rishta" into something sacred and lifelong.

A group of college students read in the newspaper that the President of their country was coming to their city as the chief guest for an athletic meet at a school for children with disabilities. The event was organised to encourage and motivate these special children.

Excited at the rare chance to see their President up close—for the first time—the students decided to skip college that day. They rushed to the city parade ground stadium early, hoping to secure seats in the front row, as close as possible to where the President would be.

When the President arrived, the crowd stood in awe, eyes fixed on him. Though he was at some distance, their wish was fulfilled. As the program unfolded, the President witnessed something far more profound than he had expected. The athletic competitions for children with disabilities—some blind, some with polio, some unable to stand without support—were themselves deeply inspiring. For the first time, the stadium crowd saw with their own eyes the burning determination in these children: the fire to achieve, despite everything. They were proving that to reach a goal, you don't need perfect eyes—you need dreams, a vision. Flight doesn't come from wings or legs alone; it comes from courage and unbreakable will.

As the events began, one after another, the initial excitement of spotting the President faded. What captured everyone's

heart now was the sheer spirit on display. The public watched, moved and was motivated.

Then came the running race. Ten children lined up—each facing their own challenges. One had crooked, uneven legs; another lived with the effects of polio; a few could barely stand and would “run” while seated, pushing themselves forward with sheer grit. No one could predict a winner; it seemed impossible to guess.

They took their positions. The whistle blew—and they started. Some ran awkwardly, limbs twisting. Some stumbled, helping each other up. Some fell, rose again. It was a scene of raw, beautiful inspiration.

Suddenly, one boy fell hard mid-race. He struggled to get up; pain etched on his face. The other nine surged ahead.

But two of them—already racing forward—glanced back. They saw their friend down, fighting to rise. Without a second thought, they stopped. They turned around. They ran back to him.

Each took one of his hands. Together, the three began again—not racing against the others, but moving as one. Step by painful step, they pushed forward.

The stadium erupted. Thunderous applause rolled through the stands. Everyone was already declaring these boys the true winners. The remaining seven crossed the finish line—one first, one second, one third—but the cheers for those three drowned everything else.

As the trio finally reached the end, the entire crowd rose to their feet. Clapping continued for what felt like forever. Tears

streamed down faces—young and old, strangers united in emotion. Hearts silently thanked the divine for the gift of able bodies, and for the deeper gift of souls like these.

In his concluding speech, the President spoke with visible emotion:

“Today, in this stadium, I learned one of life’s deepest lessons—a lesson no book could ever teach. I watched two boys abandon their chance to win, turn back, and run to their fallen friend. They lifted him, held him, and finished together.

Do you know why they did it? Because they understand the pain of not having legs the way the rest of us do. We can see they have challenges—but they “feel” it every day.

For them, the joy wasn’t in winning alone; it was in crossing the line “together”.

If these children—setting aside caste, creed, religion—can unite in pure humanity, run as one, support each other without hesitation... then why can’t we?

Let us take a vow today. Let us accept this truth: Relationships are not born of blood; they are born of feeling, of empathy. When there is feeling in the heart, even strangers become family.

When there is no feeling, even family can feel like strangers.

May we all carry this lesson forward—and choose, every day, to run back for someone who has fallen.” The stadium fell silent, then filled again with applause and quiet sobs. A moment of pure humanity had changed everyone present forever.

Abraham Lincoln

One spring day, long before he became President, young Abraham Lincoln was riding along a muddy trail with three fellow lawyers. They were travelling the circuit courts in Illinois, moving slowly on horseback, chatting and laughing to pass the time. The path was narrow, with deep mud on either side, so they rode in single file.

As they passed under a tall tree, they noticed something small and helpless in the wet grass below—two tiny baby robins that had been blown from their nest by a recent storm. The little birds fluttered weakly, chirping in distress, too young to fly. High above, their mother robin hovered anxiously, crying out in alarm, darting back and forth in helpless worry.

The three lawyers glanced down, shrugged, and kept riding. “Poor things,” one muttered. “They’ll never make it in this weather.” They rode on without stopping.

But Abraham Lincoln reined in his horse. He dismounted, his tall frame moving carefully through the mud. The others turned back, surprised, and called out, “Come on, Abe! We’ll be late for court. It’s just birds!”

Lincoln didn’t answer right away. He searched the branches until he spotted the nest, high up but reachable. With steady hands, he gently scooped up the trembling fledglings from the cold, wet grass. One by one, he climbed the tree—careful not to frighten them more—and placed them safely back in their

home. The mother robin quieted, watching from a nearby limb as if in gratitude.

When he finally climbed down, muddy and a little out of breath, his companions teased him. “Abe, why bother? They’re only robins. The world’s full of them.”

Lincoln looked at them calmly, brushing dirt from his coat. Then he said, in his quiet, thoughtful way: “Gentlemen, I could not have slept tonight if I had left those helpless little robins to perish in the wet grass.”

The group rode on in silence after that. The teasing stopped. Something in his simple act—and those honest words—stuck with them.

Years later, Abraham Lincoln would face storms far greater: personal failures, crushing election defeats, the heartbreak of losing loved ones, a divided nation tearing itself apart in civil war, and the weight of decisions that cost countless lives. Through every trial, he never forgot that quiet moment on the trail.

That same compassion drove him—the refusal to walk away when something helpless needed help, the belief that even the smallest life matters, and the resolve that conscience must guide action, no matter the cost or inconvenience. He rose from log cabin poverty to the White House not because he was the strongest or the loudest, but because he was the one who stopped, who cared deeply, and who refused to leave anyone—or anything—behind to suffer alone.

In the end, it was that same heart that preserved the Union, ended slavery, and gave hope to millions.

So, whenever life knocks you down, remember the robin's nest and the man who climbed back up the tree: True strength isn't in never falling—it's in refusing to leave others fallen. It's in choosing kindness when the world says "keep riding." And sometimes, the smallest act of mercy becomes the seed of the greatest change.

Keep going. Someone, somewhere, needs you to stop and lift them up. And in doing so, you just might save your own soul—and change the world.

This anecdote, often shared in collections of his early life (as retold by writers like James Baldwin), highlights his deep compassion, sense of duty, and the quiet strength that would later define his leadership.

Wilma Rudolph

Wilma Rudolph's story is one of the most powerful examples of human resilience, unbreakable spirit, and the ability to turn impossible odds into a legendary triumph. Born on June 23, 1940, in a poor family in Clarksville, Tennessee, as the 20th of 22 children, Wilma entered the world prematurely at just 4.5 pounds—barely clinging to life.

As a toddler, she battled one devastating illness after another: double pneumonia, scarlet fever, and then, at age four, ‘polio’—a disease that paralysed her left leg and twisted it inward. Doctors delivered the crushing verdict: "She will never walk again." Many would have accepted it. Wilma's family refused.

Her mother, Blanche, became her fiercest advocate. She massaged Wilma's leg daily, refusing to let despair settle in. "My doctor told me I would never walk again," Wilma later wrote. "My mother told me I would. I believed my mother." With love, relentless therapy, long bus rides to the nearest clinic, and the help of her siblings, who took turns massaging her weakened muscles, Wilma fought back.

By age 9, she could walk without the heavy metal brace. By age 11, the brace was gone forever. By age 12, she was running—awkward at first, then faster, faster still. The girl, who had once been told she would never stand, was now sprinting past everyone on the playground.

In high school, Wilma discovered track and field. She became a star, earning a spot on the U.S. Olympic team at just 16. At the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, she won a bronze medal in the 4x100 relay—proof she belonged on the world stage.

But 1960 changed everything.

At the Rome Olympics, Wilma Rudolph became "The Tornado"—the fastest woman alive. She won gold in the 100-meter dash (setting a world record), gold in the 200-meter dash, and gold in the 4x100 relay—becoming the first American woman to win three gold medals in track and field at a single Olympics. The world watched in awe as this once-paralysed child flew down the track, her legs a blur of power and grace.

She didn't just win races; she shattered barriers. In an era of segregation and limited opportunities for Black women and female athletes, Wilma's victories inspired millions. She returned home to ticker-tape parades, became a global icon, and later dedicated her life to coaching underprivileged children and teaching them the same lessons she lived: never give up, believe in yourself, and rise above every "never" thrown your way.

Wilma once said:

"Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lives within each of us."

And another:

"I ran and ran and ran every day, and I acquired this sense of determination, this sense of spirit that I would never, never give up, no matter what else happened."

When life tells you "You can't," when pain pins you down, when the world says "impossible"—remember Wilma. She didn't just walk again. She ran into history, carrying the dreams of every underdog with her.

Your struggles don't define your ending. Your refusal to quit does. Keep believing your mother's voice—the one inside that says "you will"—louder than any doctor's "never." The track is waiting. Run toward your gold. The potential for greatness is already in you.

In my teaching career, I once had a student who touched my heart deeply and taught me one of the most profound lessons of my life.

She was affected by polio from a young age. Walking was difficult for her; standing for long was a struggle. She wrote very slowly—her handwriting careful and deliberate—but every word she put on paper was correct. When teachers asked questions in class, her answers were always spot-on, sharp, and thoughtful. Yet speaking was her biggest challenge; she stammered badly, her words coming out haltingly, making it hard for others to follow at times.

We often thought among ourselves: If only she could write faster, she would easily be the class topper. Her potential was immense, shining through every slow but perfect answer.

For two full years, I was her class teacher. In every parent-teacher meeting, I would gently but firmly tell her parents,

“Please don’t underestimate her just because she’s a girl or because she faces physical challenges. This child has extraordinary potential. All she needs is motivation—celebrate even the smallest victories. Encourage her constantly. That’s enough.”

One day, during the school assembly, the principal approached me:

Tomorrow, one girl and one boy from your class will give speeches. Prepare them and choose who will speak.”

My eyes immediately went to her. Without hesitation, I said, “She will speak tomorrow.”

Her face lit up with pure joy. She agreed instantly, excited and ready.

But soon after, her elder brother from a senior class came to me, almost pleading:

“Sir, please don’t send her on stage. She can’t speak properly. No one will understand her. Everyone will laugh. It will be embarrassing for her—and for me too.”

I looked at him calmly and asked:

“How do you know she won’t perform well? Has she ever tried before?”

He admitted, “No, sir.”

“Then how can you be so sure? I’m her class teacher. I believe she can do it. Tomorrow, you’ll see her shine—and you’ll feel proud of her.”

He kept insisting, worried about the mockery. I stood firm:

“If she comes to me tomorrow and says she doesn’t want to speak, I’ll replace her immediately. But the decision is hers—not yours. She wants to do this. You’re trying to stop her when you should be the one cheering her on. Instead of motivating her, you’re demotivating her.”

He left unconvinced. After school, her mother called me at home, echoing the same fears. I repeated the same thing: trust her, give her the chance.

The next day arrived. The entire school—her classmates, her brother’s classmates, teachers, vice-principal, principal—everyone was watching curiously, almost holding their breath. It was exactly like the way crowds once stared at Wilma Rudolph, wondering if the “impossible” could really happen.

When her name was called, she walked slowly to the stage, every step a quiet victory. As she began to speak, something magical unfolded. The stammer that usually tripped her words vanished. Her voice flowed clearly, fluently, confidently. Every sentence was crisp, every word perfectly placed. She delivered her speech without a single pause, without a single stumble. The audience sat in stunned silence, then erupted.

The applause that followed was thunderous. It felt like every clap was patting me on the back, saying, “You were right.” Tears welled up in many eyes—including mine. Her brother stood there, speechless, pride replacing his earlier fear.

That moment reminded me: Never, ever underestimate anyone.

A teacher’s greatest responsibility is to discover the hidden spark in every child, to fan it with belief and motivation, and to help them rise higher than anyone thought possible.

Children fall—that’s part of growing. But it is our sacred duty to teach them how to stand again, stronger each time.

To every teacher reading this: Look for that one child others overlook. Give them the stage. Believe in them louder than their doubts. Because when they rise, they don’t just win for themselves—they light the way for everyone watching.

And to every child who feels “less than”: Your struggles don’t define your limits. Your courage does. One day, the world that once doubted you will stand and applaud.

Keep believing. Keep trying. Your moment on the stage is coming—and it will be beautiful.

Tree – Shadow

One day, there was a housewarming ceremony at our Hindi teacher's home. A circular was sent to all teachers stating that every teacher should contribute at least ₹500 toward a common gift. We all contributed accordingly. The circular required not only the money but also our signatures. The circular reached me last. I glanced at it and saw that almost everyone had contributed the full amount and signed. So, I did the same. It also mentioned that the next evening at 7 PM, all teachers were to gather at the school premises and proceed together to the event.

As I handed the signed circular back to the peon, my eyes fell on the Kannada teacher's name. She had contributed only ₹100 and signed.

Later that afternoon, during lunch, by sheer coincidence, the Kannada madam and I ended up sitting face-to-face. The moment I saw her, the circular flashed in my mind. I gently asked, “Madam, the circular clearly said minimum ₹500—why did you give only ₹100? Isn't that being a bit too rigid?”

The instant those words left my mouth, her face changed. It paled, her eyes welled up, and her voice trembled as she replied:

“Sir, that was all I had. I had saved those ₹100 carefully for my daughter's birthday. My husband is paralysed. Our entire household runs on my salary alone. Next week is my younger

daughter's birthday too. The circular said ₹500 minimum... I felt so ashamed. At least I gave ₹100. If I had given nothing, the shame would have killed me.”

Her words pierced my heart. I felt terrible for having asked so casually.

A few days later, after school, we had a meeting with the Principal. She handed each teacher an A4 sheet and asked us to write the school's positives and negatives, or any suggestions from the heart, about the management or the environment.

Suddenly, the Kannada madam's words echoed in my mind. On that paper, I wrote:

“A principal is like a tree. Everyone who sits in its shade should feel peace and comfort. The tree itself bears the scorching sun, yet it protects those beneath it from the heat. Rich or poor, everyone finds shelter and serenity under its branches.

In the same way, a principal's true role is to truly see and understand their staff—to be aware of their joys, struggles, and realities.

In our school, whenever any teacher has a family event or function, we always ask for an equal contribution from everyone. This is a beautiful thing—it builds unity and togetherness among the staff. But not everyone has the same financial situation at that moment. Not everyone may even want to attend the function.

Many teachers might think: ‘If I don’t want to go, why should I pay?’ Yet they feel forced and compelled to contribute anyway.

If we truly want to show equality and fairness in the staff, change the circular to say: 'You may contribute whatever amount you wish, as per your convenience and heartfelt desire.' Or, better still, let those with higher salaries contribute more, and those with less contribute accordingly.

Making ₹500 compulsory brings happiness to those who can easily afford it, but for those who struggle, it becomes a burden. A compassionate leader must consider this, too.

The best approach? The principal could buy the gift from their own salary and write 'From the entire staff.' Watch how that single act creates a truly dedicated, loyal, and loving team.

Unfortunately, that doesn't happen here."

I also wrote in detail about the Kannada madam's situation—the paralysed husband, the single income supporting the family, the saved money for her child's birthday, and the deep shame she felt.

The Principal had no idea about any of this.

She became so emotional while reading it. What she did next was truly unbelievable and heart-touching.

She personally organised a beautiful birthday celebration for the Kannada madam's daughter. She bought the gifts herself and wrote on them: "From the entire staff of the school."

That small act of empathy and leadership turned pain into joy, shame into gratitude, and obligation into genuine love.

One thoughtful voice, one honest letter, one compassionate leader—and suddenly, the entire atmosphere changed.

This is the power of empathy in leadership.

This is what happens when someone truly listens and acts with heart.

Never underestimate the impact of speaking up kindly for those who are silently struggling.

A single act of understanding can transform lives, build unbreakable bonds, and create a workplace (or school) filled with real unity—not forced, but felt deeply in the soul.

Be that voice. Be that tree of shade. Be the change that makes others feel seen, valued, and truly cared for.

Because when leaders lead with heart, miracles happen.

Seeing that beautiful act of kindness and empathy from the Principal, my heart whispered to me:

"Now the tree has truly started giving shade."

In that moment, the metaphor came alive—the Principal, like the protective tree we had written about, was no longer just a figure of authority. She had stepped into her true role: bearing the heat herself so others could find comfort, shelter, and relief beneath her care.

One small, heartfelt suggestion had sparked real change. Compassion had taken root, and shade—real, soothing, life-giving shade—was finally spreading over those who needed it most.

This is the quiet magic of leading with heart: when we speak up with kindness and truly see another's struggle, the "tree" awakens. It stops being just a symbol and begins to protect, nurture, and heal.

Keep planting those seeds of empathy. One day, you'll look around and feel the same gentle whisper in your own heart:

"Ab ped chhaya dene laga hai..." Now the tree has begun to give shade.

And when it does, you'll know—your voice mattered. Your care created real change. Keep being that voice. The world needs more trees like that.

An Ego

I

I still remember the school where I was appointed Discipline-in-Charge. Within just 3-4 months, every boy started coming to school in a proper uniform. After three months, in September, on the occasion of Teachers' Day, I was given the Best Teacher Award.

That moment didn't sit well with some of the senior teachers. They couldn't digest how a new teacher could receive such recognition so quickly. They felt bitter—despite years of service, none of them had ever been honoured with an award. From that day onward, those older teachers were quietly waiting for me to make even the smallest mistake. They wanted to corner me, surround me, and drag me in front of the principal to humiliate me.

I was new to this profession, completely unaware of their resentment and schemes. My only focus was on improving discipline at the school—I poured my heart into that alone.

Then came the school picnic. I politely declined to go. I told them I wouldn't be joining and preferred to rest at home, so I took leave that day.

Meanwhile, a group of about 10 boys from Class 10 had planned their own separate outing. Their group leader called me and said, "Sir, we're going to Hyderabad for a picnic. Will

you come with us?" I refused outright. I said, "I'm not even going on the official school picnic, so there's no way I'm travelling so far to Hyderabad with you all." The boys didn't insist much and hung up. I forgot about the conversation entirely.

The picnic day arrived. As planned, I stayed home on leave. The school staff took the official group—mostly from Classes 8, 9, and 10—on the school-organised trip within the city. But those 10 boys, with their parents' permission, went to Hyderabad separately. They had taken my name, telling their parents, "Sami Sir is coming with us." Hearing my name, the parents allowed it without a second thought. No one bothered to call me to confirm whether it was true.

I had no idea any of this was happening. All I knew was that a group of Class 10 boys was planning their own little trip with friends. I had no clue how far they would actually take it.

The boys booked a cab and set off for Hyderabad under the pretext of my name, 8 to 10 of them.

That evening, when the boys were delayed in returning, worried parents called the principal: "Our children haven't come back from the picnic yet." The principal replied calmly, "Our school picnic ended by 3 PM, and all the children went home long ago." The parents insisted, "No, our kids said they were going to Hyderabad for the picnic." Confused, the principal asked who went to Hyderabad with them. The parents mentioned my name.

One of the teachers—the very ones who had been waiting for a chance to trap me—called to "confirm." When his call came, he asked, "Sir, where are you?" I said, "I'm at home." He

pressed, "You didn't go?" I was puzzled: "Go where?" He said, "To Hyderabad." I laughed in disbelief: "Why would I go to Hyderabad?" Then he dropped the bomb: "Some boys went to Hyderabad for a picnic and took your name. Didn't you know?"

It was the same teacher who had been burning with jealousy, eager to see me in the dock. Now he had his "evidence." I explained calmly: "Two days ago, the boys called and invited me to their picnic. I clearly said no. After that, I have no idea what happened." But he refused to believe me. To him, I was lying to cover up that I had gone along.

The boys eventually returned home that evening—I don't know what unfolded in their houses. But the next day, when I reached school, my heart sank. I saw teachers beating those boys, demanding, "Tell the truth! Was Sami Sir with you or not?" The boys, bruised and tearful, kept repeating, "Sir, we're telling the truth. We swear on the Quran, we swear on our mothers—Sami Sir was not with us." But the teachers wouldn't stop: "No, Sir was there! You're just protecting him. Tell the truth—if Sir wasn't there, just say his name, and we'll let you go."

Those boys were honest to the core. Since I wasn't with them, they refused to lie, no matter how much pain they endured. Watching them being beaten while desperately defending the truth brought tears to my eyes. My heart broke into pieces.

In the end, those boys were suspended. Yet not a single one of them took my name to save themselves. They stood by the truth. But all the teachers convinced themselves that I had

used my influence to silence them—that I had somehow forced them not to mention me.

Even today, the memory of those innocent boys taking blows for honesty, refusing to lie even to escape punishment, fills me with both pride and deep sorrow. They protected my honour when I wasn't even there to protect them.

On the day of the Class 10 farewell, those same 10 boys were proudly showing their English teacher photos from their trip to Hyderabad on their mobile phones.

While scrolling through the pictures, the mam (teacher) asked, “Where is Sami Sir in these photos?”

The boys replied innocently and honestly, “Ma'am, Sir didn't come at all—so how could he be in the pictures?”

That simple, straightforward answer hit like a quiet thunderclap.

In that moment, a few teachers who had been part of the earlier suspicion finally realised the truth: Sami Sir had been deliberately framed by the senior teachers. The boys had never lied. They had protected the truth—and in doing so, they had unknowingly protected me too.

The weight of that realisation slowly settled over the staff room. Some faces turned pale with guilt; others looked away in discomfort. What had started as jealousy and a desire to pull down a newcomer had ended up exposing the pettiness of those who orchestrated it.

Those honest boys, with their clear eyes and unwavering integrity, had done what no one else could—they had let the truth speak for itself. And in that one innocent exchange

during the farewell, the entire ugly conspiracy began to unravel.

II

There was a school with around 2,000 to 3,000 students. For a single subject, there were 8–9 teachers, and each class had 8–9 sections. In the Social Studies department alone, there were 6–7 teachers. I had just been newly appointed.

During the introductions and the Teachers' Day programme, I sang a song and received the "Best Singer Award" among all the teachers. That performance made me quite popular in the school. Soon after, I was made the class teacher of Class 9.

The school had a unique system: classes were divided strictly according to students' marks. Those who scored 90% and above were placed in one section, those with 80% in another, 70% in yet another, and so on. Every section had at least 60 students. I was shocked by the strength of the classes. This was the first school in my life where I had seen such large numbers.

The Head of the Department (HOD) was given charge of all the toppers' sections — the 90% and above classes. I had always wished to teach and interact with those bright students, but I never got the opportunity. Not even in Class 10. Even the toppers' sections of Class 8 and Class 9 were assigned to her. She was the in-charge of all the top-performing classes.

One day, the HOD was absent, and I was sent to her Class 8 toppers' section as a substitute. I was really excited. My long-cherished wish was finally coming true.

I wanted to test whether these students truly deserved to be in the toppers' section or had only reached it because of cheating. As soon as I entered the class, the children looked at me curiously. It was the first time they were seeing me, though they knew my name.

I had been instructed not to teach any new chapter, but only to revise what had already been covered. I asked the students how many chapters they had completed. They told me that two chapters in History had been done. So, I began asking questions from those two chapters.

The chapter was "From Trade to Territory." I started with questions about the Battle of Plassey. At first, they gave good answers, but when I asked slightly deeper questions, they went blank. I immediately understood that the HOD had only taught them whatever was written in the textbook – nothing beyond that.

I decided to explain the entire Battle of Plassey in detail. It is one of the most important events in Indian history. I began at the very beginning – with the first Nawab, Murshid Quli Khan, then Alivardi Khan, Sirajudhaulah, and Mir Jafar's relationship with Alivardi Khan. I explained why Alivardi Khan chose Sirajudhaulah as his successor and why Mir Jafar was jealous of him. The students listened with complete attention, as if they were watching a thrilling movie.

In the end, I narrated the whole story in those 40 minutes. Every single student enjoyed it thoroughly.

As soon as the class ended and the bell rang, the students jumped up excitedly and started saying, "Oh man, why did the bell ring so early? The story was getting so interesting!"

They turned to me and said, “Sir, our ma’am never explained it to us in so much detail. Why don’t you come and teach our class?”

I smiled and replied, “Your teacher is your own HOD, ma’am – why would I come? But if she ever goes on leave, I’ll definitely come and take your class next time. Don’t worry.”

Saying this, I left the classroom.

The whole day, the students kept talking about the same story. Some of them even went home and researched the topic I had mentioned – and found everything I said was correct. This encouraged them to study that topic even more deeply on their own.

The next day, when the HOD ma’am returned to school, the children excitedly told her, “Ma’am, yesterday when you were on leave, Sir came and taught us about the Battle of Plassey. It was so interesting! Ma’am, why didn’t you explain it to us in so much detail? Sir’s students from other sections always wait eagerly for his classes and keep talking about him and his way of teaching.”

Hearing this, it seemed like her ego was hurt. Although we still greeted each other normally in the staff room, deep down, she probably started thinking about how to get me out of the school.

A few days later, during the periodic tests, I was assigned as the invigilator for HOD ma’am’s Class 10 section. By chance, that day the paper was Social Science, which made me quite happy, as I got another opportunity to enter her class.

I went to the exam hall, the test began, and I started walking around the room. While moving about, a thought came to mind: "Let's see what kind of question paper our HOD has set."

I picked up a question paper and read it – it was decent. Then, as I continued walking around, I also glanced at the students' answers, especially those of the toppers, to see how well they were writing. And honestly, their answers were really impressive.

In that question paper, there was one MCQ: "In Sri Lanka, which of the following religious communities is in the minority?" The correct option was ****Christian****, but the students had ticked Tamil.

Seeing this made me quite uneasy. The exam ended, I collected all the answer sheets, and told the students, "All of you have marked the same MCQ incorrectly. The correct answer should be Christian, but you've all ticked Tamil."

I explained, "Tamil refers to a linguistic or ethnic minority, but the question is specifically about a religious minority. Minorities can be of different types – understand the question properly, or else you'll lose a mark straight away in the board exams."

I added, "On top of that, you all are from the toppers' section – HOD ma'am's class. If even this section makes such minor mistakes, what will the other sections do?"

The students, wanting to confirm the answer, took the question paper to the HOD ma'am. She told them that Tamil was the only correct answer and that Christian was wrong.

Confused, the students came back to me and said, "Sir, ma'am said Tamil is the correct answer."

I replied, "Let's do one thing – check it on Google right now." I took out my mobile phone, searched, and showed them that the correct option was indeed Christian (as Christians form about 7.6% of Sri Lanka's population, making them a smaller religious group compared to others like Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims, according to reliable sources like census data).

The students ran back to the HOD ma'am and told her, "Ma'am, Google shows the correct option is Christian only."

She looked at me, and I looked back at her. She was glaring at me in such a way that it felt like she was saying, "You've crossed the line by challenging me and made a big mistake."

After that, I was never sent back to teach Class 8 or Class 10 again. Sometimes those classes would remain completely empty because the regular teachers were absent, and I would just sit idly. Yet, despite that, I was never assigned as a substitute for those classes again—especially not for the HOD's periods.

I often saw the HOD sitting together with the coordinators, having lunch with them, hanging out, or even going shopping. It was the coordinators who arranged substitute teachers for vacant periods. From their close friendship, I realised that I would never again be given the HOD's classes as a substitute, no matter how many periods remained without a teacher. I simply wouldn't be allowed to take them.

I used to wonder: What was my mistake in all this? I had never imagined that teaching children sincerely and with genuine passion could hurt someone's ego so deeply.

No one ever gave me any formal training. Whatever knowledge I have of my subject came entirely from my own interest, my personal research, and the difficult questions asked by the students themselves—questions that forced me to study topics in greater depth and detail. Fourteen years of hard work, fourteen years of self-study, and fourteen years of continuous research have made me better at my subject.

However, when someone becomes the HOD, a lot of expectations come with the role – from management, students, and colleagues. Everyone feels that if someone has been made HOD, there must be something special about them that others lack. And it should be that way.

An HOD's teaching methodology, teaching style, behaviour with students, and interaction with colleagues – in every aspect, they should stand out and truly reflect the position of a Head of Department.

In my teaching career, I have seen many people who, after becoming HODs, start to consider it beneath their dignity to teach classes VI and VII. But if someone is genuinely a good HOD with strong teaching methodology, they should actually take charge of the weaker sections. It is the HOD's responsibility to strengthen the basics of all students.

However, what I have often observed in schools is that HODs tend to stay close to the Principal or Coordinator. They influence them and conveniently take the classes of their choice. Whenever new staff members join, HODs either push them into the lower sections or assign them the weaker classes.

In my opinion, the selection of an HOD in a school should not be based merely on seniority. It should be based on the

teacher's content knowledge, their ability to connect with students, their skill in clearing doubts with depth and clarity, and, most importantly, their willingness to continuously upgrade themselves.

Even today, students ask many questions for which I don't immediately know the answer. In those moments, I openly look it up on Google right then and there and explain it to them. I never feel ashamed about it—because learning is a lifelong process. A person keeps learning until the day they die: sometimes from teachers, sometimes from friends, sometimes from circumstances, sometimes from failures and setbacks, and sometimes from life itself.

Life is, in fact, the greatest teacher of all—it first examines you, then teaches you the lesson.

Learning is a lifelong journey. If someone claims, “I have stopped learning,” it simply means they have stopped growing.

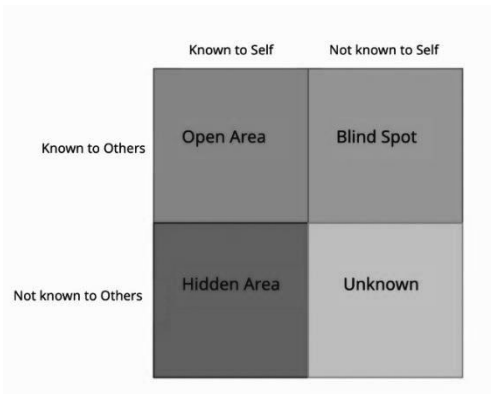
So please set your ego aside and think about what is truly best for the children. If you see a quality in another teacher that you admire, it is far better to try to develop that same quality in yourself rather than feeling threatened by it.

The Johari Window – A Powerful Lesson in Self-discovery

Developed in 1955 by psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham (the name “Johari” combines the first letters of their names), the Johari Window was created to help people understand the dynamics of self-awareness and interpersonal communication. It’s not about judgment or perfection – it’s about empowerment. By shining light on what we know (and don’t know) about ourselves and what others see in us, we expand our “open” space, reduce hidden barriers, and unlock hidden strengths. The result? Stronger relationships, sharper leadership, deeper confidence, and a life lived with purpose.

The Four Quadrants: Your Personal Map to Growth

The Johari Window is visualised as a four-pane window, divided by what is known to you versus unknown to you, and what is known to others versus unknown to others. Think of it as four rooms in the house of your personality – some brightly lit, some shadowy, some waiting to be explored.



Here's a breakdown of each quadrant, with motivational insights to inspire your journey:

1. Open Area (The Arena) – Known to Self and Known to Others

This is your public self: your strengths, values, skills, and behaviours that you openly share. It's the foundation of trust and collaboration.

Motivational nudge: Celebrate this space! The larger your Open Area, the more authentic your connections become. In classrooms, workplaces, or friendships, real teamwork thrives. Ask yourself: "What do I already share freely that lights up my relationships?"

2. Blind Spot (The Hidden Feedback Zone) – Unknown to Self but Known to Others

These are the traits, habits, or talents others notice but you don't see – perhaps your natural charisma, a subtle impatience, or an untapped creative gift.

Motivational nudge: Feedback is not criticism; it's a golden key to growth! Embrace it with an open heart. Every blind spot you uncover becomes a new superpower. Remember: the most successful people actively seek honest input because they know it accelerates their rise.

3. Hidden Area (The Façade) – Known to Self but Unknown to Others

This is your private world – fears, dreams, past experiences, or vulnerabilities you choose not to reveal.

Motivational nudge: True courage lies in selective disclosure. When you safely share parts of your hidden self, you build deeper bonds and free yourself from the weight of pretence. Start small: one honest conversation can transform a relationship forever.

4. Unknown Area (The Discovery Zone) – Unknown to Self and Unknown to Others

This holds untapped potential – latent talents, subconscious drives, or future possibilities that emerge through new experiences, challenges, or reflection.

Motivational nudge: This is where magic happens! Life's greatest adventures lie here. Approach the unknown with curiosity and excitement – every exploration reveals new strengths you never knew you had.

The Dynamic Process: Expanding Your Open Window

The true power of the Johari Window lies in its movement. Your goal? Shrink the other three quadrants and dramatically enlarge the Open Area. How? Through two powerful actions: self-disclosure (sharing more of yourself) and feedback (inviting honest input from others).

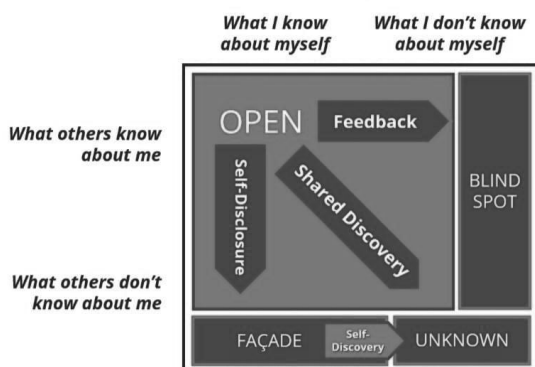
- Self-disclosure reduces your Hidden Area and creates shared discovery.

- Feedback shrinks your Blind Spot and sparks insight.

- Together, they push into the Unknown Area, turning potential into reality.

This isn't a one-time exercise – it's a lifelong practice. The bigger your Open Area, the more energy, trust, and opportunity flow into your life.

Goal: Increase the Open Area



Why This Matters:

In school, we learn facts. Beyond classes, we master ourselves. The Johari Window equips you to:

- Become a more empathetic leader and teammate.
- Build relationships that feel safe and inspiring.
- Overcome self-doubt by turning blind spots into strengths.
- Discover hidden talents that could shape your career and purpose.

Few Inspirational Teachers

DR.S. RADHAKRISHNAN

Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (India) – Turning His Birthday into Teachers’ Day

Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, an Indian philosopher, scholar, and the second President of India, is celebrated for his profound contributions to education and philosophy. When his students and admirers wanted to celebrate his birthday in 1962, Radhakrishnan humbly suggested dedicating the day (September 5) to honour all teachers in India, leading to the establishment of Teachers’ Day. As a professor at the University of Calcutta and Oxford University, he bridged Indian and Western philosophies, making complex ideas accessible. His lectures inspired students worldwide, and his donation of much of his presidential salary to educational causes reflected his belief in education’s transformative power. His legacy continues to inspire educators to prioritise humility and societal good.

ANNE SULLIVAN

Anne Sullivan, often called the “miracle worker,” transformed Helen Keller's life through relentless dedication. In 1887, Sullivan began teaching Keller, who was unable to communicate effectively due to her disabilities. Sullivan’s innovative approach involved spelling words into Keller’s hand, famously leading to the breakthrough moment when Keller connected the word “W-A-T-E-R” to the sensation of

water from a pump. This unlocked Keller’s ability to learn, eventually enabling her to master over 600 words, math, and Braille in months, and later become the first deaf-blind person to earn a college degree. Sullivan’s patience and creative teaching methods inspired educators worldwide, showing that perseverance can overcome seemingly insurmountable barriers.

PETER TABICHI

Peter Tabichi, a Kenyan science teacher and Franciscan friar, was awarded the Global Teacher Prize in 2019 for his extraordinary work in a remote village school in Kenya’s Rift Valley. Teaching in a school with limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and no internet, Tabichi donated 80% of his salary to support poor students with books, uniforms, and fees. He founded a science club that led students to win national and international science competitions, inspiring them to pursue STEM careers. Despite challenges such as poverty and inadequate infrastructure, Tabichi’s innovative teaching and community engagement transformed his students’ lives, earning him recognition as the “World’s Best Teacher.” His story shows the power of selflessness and creativity in education.

ERIN GRUWELL

Erin Gruwell, a high school English teacher in Long Beach, California, began her career in 1994 at Woodrow Wilson High School, teaching students labelled “unteachable” due to challenges like poverty, gang violence, and racism.

Determined to connect with her disengaged students, Gruwell used unconventional methods, such as assigning them to write personal journals about their lives, inspired by books like *The Diary of Anne Frank*. This fostered a sense of community and trust, leading her students—later known as the “Freedom Writers”—to overcome their challenges and graduate from high school.

ALBERT CAMUS AND LOUIS GERMAIN

Albert Camus, the Nobel Prize-winning French philosopher and author, never forgot the profound influence of his primary school teacher, Louis Germain, in Algiers. Growing up in poverty, Camus found in Germain a mentor who recognised his potential and encouraged his intellectual curiosity. Germain provided extra lessons and advocated for Camus to receive a scholarship to attend lycée, a pivotal step toward his literary career. In 1957, upon winning the Nobel Prize in Literature, Camus wrote a heartfelt letter to Germain, saying, “Without you, without the affectionate hand you extended to the small, poor child that I was, without your teaching and example, none of all this would have happened.” Camus dedicated his Nobel acceptance speech to Germain, a testament to the teacher’s role in shaping a literary giant. This story highlights how a teacher’s belief in a student can change a student’s life trajectory.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND ARISTOTLE

Alexander the Great, one of history’s greatest conquerors, was profoundly shaped by his teacher, the philosopher Aristotle.

From age 13 to 16, Alexander studied under Aristotle at the Temple of the Nymphs in Mieza. Aristotle taught him philosophy, ethics, politics, and science, instilling in him a love of learning and Greek culture that influenced Alexander's vision of a cosmopolitan empire. Aristotle's lessons on leadership and morality guided Alexander's campaigns, and their bond was so strong that Alexander reportedly sent exotic plants and animals back to Aristotle for study during his conquests. A famous quote attributed to Alexander reflects this: "I am indebted to my father for living, but to my teacher for living well." This story shows how a teacher's wisdom can shape a leader's worldview and legacy.

APJ ABDUL KALAM AND HIS SCHOOL TEACHER

Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, India's "Missile Man" and former President, often spoke of his science teacher, Sivasubramanian Iyer, who ignited his passion for learning. In Rameswaram, Iyer taught young Kalam about aerodynamics by explaining bird flight during a beachside lesson, making science come to life and inspiring. When Kalam faced social barriers due to his background, Iyer invited him to his home, breaking caste norms to teach equality through action. This mentorship fuelled Kalam's curiosity, leading to his contributions to India's space program. In a 2013 incident at the International Space Development Conference, Kalam shared his dinner plate with a student, offering a "leaf of inspiration" that the student would cherish for a lifetime. This story underscores how a teacher's encouragement and egalitarian values can inspire a student to achieve greatness.

Conclusion

Finally, this is all I want to say: Raising and nurturing children is the shared responsibility of both teachers and parents. Neither teachers alone nor parents alone bear the full responsibility. For a child's proper upbringing, it is essential to build a genuine connection with them—whether you are a teacher or a parent. If a child lives in constant fear of you, then you are a failed teacher, a failed mother, or a failed father. That fear often pushes the child toward other wrong paths and negative influences.

In parent-teacher meetings (PTMs), don't just ask about your child's marks. Inquire about their behaviour, nature, and character. Discuss these aspects openly. Teachers, in turn, should take the initiative to learn about the student's history, family background, culture, mood, and overall circumstances—ask the parents about all of this.

Make it a point to attend every PTM. The primary concern should always be the child's behaviour, because while you may be hired for your talent and skills, you will often be fired for your behaviour and attitude.

And sadly, it is a strange coincidence of our times that schools today rarely teach values anymore.

Both parents and teachers should be like tamarind:

Not so sweet that people swallow you whole, and not so bitter that people spit you out.

Always remember one important thing: Children usually become physically mature around the ages of 12–13. Everyone reaches physical maturity at roughly the same age, but there is no fixed age for mental maturity. It can develop at any age, even much later. We need to have patience.

Even though the books, syllabus, teachers, school, and class timings are all the same, children still end up getting different marks. This difference is not due to anything physical but to mental differences.

God (the Almighty) has intentionally created these mental differences because He has to run the world. For the world to function properly, every kind of professional is necessary to keep people interdependent.

That's why not everyone becomes a doctor, an engineer, or a lawyer. If all thieves and criminals disappeared, the jobs of the police and lawyers would be in danger. If all labourers and workers vanished, then the jobs of engineers would be at risk. If everyone became rich, who would do the small everyday tasks in your home? And if everyone remained poor, how would they even survive?

Keep this in mind as well: We make our own plans and set our own goals, but God has His own separate plans—because He has to keep the world running. That's why sometimes God destroys our plans... because He knows that those very plans would end up destroying you.